

THE CONQUEST OF THE GLOOM

and other Devotional Studies

By

JAMES L. GRAY, B.A.

Jagadhri, India.

With an

INTRODUCTION

by

E. STANLEY JONES, D.D.

Author of

“THE CHRIST of the INDIAN ROAD.”

MARSHALL, MORGAN & SCOTT, LTD.
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

Made and printed in Great Britain
by
Hunt, Barnard & Co., Ltd.
London & Aylesbury.

TO
MY MOTHER AND FATHER
MY TEACHERS
IN
THE WAY OF LIFE.

Preface

THESE studies were contributed to the *United Church Review*, the official organ of the United Church of Northern India. Many of them have been delivered as addresses to the congregation of the Kellogg Memorial Church, Landour, and at conventions and other such gatherings throughout India. The present book is the result of requests for their publication in more permanent form.

My thanks are due to Rev. J. W. Bowman, M.A., Ph.D., editor of the *United Church Review*, for permission to reprint these studies; to Dr. J. J. Lucas, of the American Presbyterian Mission, and Dr. Pickett of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who have ever been ready with encouragement and advice; and to Dr. E. Stanley Jones, who has written an introductory note.

Amid the perplexities of the modern day, perplexities of faith and conduct, there is one clear and open way of duty. It is "the culture of the soul." This alone will dispel that haunting sense of gloom, that wistful uncertainty which has overshadowed life.

To try to help some to find that there is a way of glory in the gloom is the aim of these studies.

J. L. G.

Jagadhri, India.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. As Jesus Passed By	13
II. The Glory that Outshone the Gloom	16
III. Busy Here and There	22
IV. Graven Hands	29
V. The Value of Faith	35
VI. The Sin of Silence	41
VII. His Will	48
VIII. The Anchorage that is Always Safe	55
IX. The Friend of the Bridegroom ..	62
X. The High Calling of Christ Jesus ..	68
XI. The Cure of Care	74
XII. The Deprivation of Prayerlessness	80
XIII. His Resurrection Power	87
XIV. Keep Yourselves in the Love of God	93
XV. The Sin of Prayerlessness ..	99
XVI. At the Feet of Jesus	105
XVII. Possession and Beneficence ..	110
XVIII. Deep Waters of Obedience ..	116
XIX. The Bearing of the Burden ..	122
XX. The Decrease that is Increase ..	129
XXI. Worthy is the Lamb	136
XXII. Is There any Word from the Lord?	140
XXIII. The Retrospect of Sin	147
XXIV. The Value of Going Back ..	153

I.

"As Jesus Passed By"

THE greatest and most beneficent of the acts of Christ were done "as He passed by." Moving from town to town, down dusty roads and by the shining waters of Galilee, in the pillared courts of the Temple, or as He rested by the roadside well—it was thus naturally, simply, almost casually, that the Son of Man wrought His works of mercy, spoke His words of love, and drew the world to Himself.

One would almost have excused the Master if He had been too pre-occupied with thoughts of His high destiny, or of the overshadowing Cross, or of His Father's Home to feel as He did the impact of the world's daily need, or to be arrested by its interrupting calls. But such was not the case. No day but was the gift of His Father; no road to be trod but was marked by countless opportunities, maimed bodies and needy souls no conversation that could not be used to introduce men to the Kingdom of Love. And so His "passing by" was ever a benediction.

It was as "Jesus passed by" that He called Matthew the publican (Matt. 9: 9). No one had ever thought it worth while taking notice of Levi till Jesus looked into his face and realized the possibilities of his life. Many religious leaders had come and gone along that road. Priests

The Conquest of the Gloom

innumerable had seen Levi sitting at the receipt of customs. But the passing of Jesus was something different ; it was a beneficent ministry, the transforming impact of a pure and holy soul, and when Jesus called, Levi was ready.

It was "as Jesus passed by" that he saw the man born blind (John 9 : 1). From blind childhood to blind youth ; from blind youth to hopeless manhood he had grown. All life for him had been darkness and beggary. There he sat by the wayside and thousands passed him by. Perhaps a word of pity was spoken. Perhaps a carelessly flung coin rattled in his beggar's bowl—but nothing more till Jesus came his way. We read that Christ "saw." Of course He did. He saw the hopelessness that would not even ask for healing ; He saw the misery of the dark, dark years ; He saw the possibilities dormant in that patient heart and, "as He passed," He healed, and a mighty witness to the Son of God was born.

Again it was "as He passed by" that Jesus won Zacchaeus (Luke. 19 : 1). Just a little man hiding in a tree ; a man who was heartily disliked as a traitor to the Jewish cause, and an extortioner to boot. It would have been so easy for Christ to move unheeding on. The crowds were thronging Him, and other calls were clamant. But from out of the branches of the sycamore tree there gazed a hungry soul, and, urgent as other claims might be, there was none more urgent than this. So home Jesus went with Zacchaeus, and ere He went on His way "salvation had come to that house."

And was it not as Jesus "passed through

As Jesus Passed By

Samaria " that a city was really won to Himself? Just an hour's rest by a roadside well, and an unfortunate woman busy about her monotonous daily task. But not so for Jesus. It was all part of His Father's plan, all part of His consecrated life of service. So the woman forgot her water-pot in her wonder, a crowd gathered about the Master, and the Water of Life flowed beneficently till, in later days, a city turned to God. (Acts 8 : 5, 6.)

So I learn that "as Jesus passed by" He won a disciple, He gained a witness, He redeemed a soul, He saved a city. What a blessed passing was His!

And what of ours? We try to live an organized day—so planned that it has no place for interruptions. They annoy and disturb us. We consider them waste of time. We must reach our objective quickly. There is no time in our fevered gait to hear the wayside calls. We are too intent on the destination to pause for the casual opportunity. You remember that interview when you were so intent on completing your business that you never said a single word for the Master. Perhaps it was a letter you might have written to a soul in the depths. Or was it a visit you should have made that simply got crowded out?

But "as Jesus passed by" He could make time to "see" and save, for all His going out and in was part of His Father's will. This was His secret, and so the Master's interruptions were the world's benedictions.



II

The Glory that Outshone the Gloom.

THE shadows and darkness of the Cross with its experience of death and shame have been so portrayed as to exclude almost completely the truth that to Jesus there was joy and even a glory there. It is this aspect that is suggested by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews when he says that Jesus, "for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross" (12 : 1). Not that the Cross, with its identification with sin, was less than an experience from which the nature of Christ, both in its human and divine aspects, continually shrank. All the way was dark for the Son of God, and it gathered to blackness about the Cross. But, nevertheless, there was a light to guide Him, and a joy past the gloom that enabled Him to endure. He knew that the Cross was not the end, but the beginning, and He saw the radiance beyond. But our hearts ask the instinctive question—Where was any glory amid such unrelieved gloom? Let us try to discover the reason for this strange and enduring joy of the Master.

There must have been the assurance that through the Cross He was to *complete the conquest of sin*. The writer of the Epistle speaks of Jesus as "resisting sin unto blood," and of the "destruction" of the Evil One, while St. Paul tells of the way in which

The Glory that Outshone the Gloom

the Cross disclosed the reality of sin, and "made a show of the powers of evil." If the experience of death was to do this, then I do not wonder that Jesus was ready to die. For He, as none other, knew the depredations of sin upon mankind. He looked upon the world with the understanding and sympathy of a perfect manhood, and at the same time with an insight into the awful and irreparable ruin of sin, an insight which was undimmed by any contact with evil. He understood the divine plan, and what man might have become but for the arch enemy of the soul. He "for Whom and by Whom the universe exists," comprehended those high purposes for which man had been created in the very likeness of God. To gaze upon the handiwork of His Father, and to behold it marred and broken and imperfect because evil stalked unchallenged through the land, was to bring an intolerable pain to His spirit, a pain that ever and anon found pitying expression. He realized to the full the extent of the damage that sin was effecting. Only perfect purity could comprehend what it really was which made men unkind and selfish and unclean. He saw the allurements and deceptions of evil, and how the souls of men were toyed with and ruined and cast down for ever from their place of rightful dignity and achievement. How Jesus must have longed to deal once and for all with this soul-destroying power working havoc upon the creation of God!

So He went to the Cross to join battle with evil for the soul of man, and as He went this was

The Conquest of the Gloom

part of His joy, that victory was sure. Hear Him, as a few hours before the end, He rallies His bewildered followers, and with the joy of coming triumph cries, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." He rejoiced to know that His death was revealing to the world the true nature of sin in its persistent and undying opposition to all goodness. No more need men be deceived into careless or superficial views of evil. For all time it would now be clear to those who cared to see, that sin in its undying malignity seeks to accomplish the destruction of all that is good and fair and of God. Jesus was ready to give His life in order to reveal the lengths to which the evil heart of man was prepared to go to stifle and silence for ever the convicting voice of perfect purity and love. His death was to give to the world such a revelation of the reality of sin, and liberate such spiritual forces of forgiveness and assurance and gratitude, as would make a life of victory possible to the child of God. This was surely a great part of His conquest of the gloom.

Then part of the "joy set before Him" was undoubtedly the sense of *completing the will of His Father*. Jesus had expressly told His followers that what sustained Him daily, and that which was equivalent to meat and drink for Him was "to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work" (John 4: 34). The Cross Jesus saw was contained in the will of God, and so there could have been no sense of a completed task had He stopped short of Calvary. It was from the Cross He could calmly say, "It is finished." Biography

The Glory that Outshone the Gloom

does not record that any have been able to contemplate their achievements, however remarkable, with complete satisfaction. Even the great Apostle had to cry :

Oh the regret, the struggle and the failing !

Oh the days desolate and useless years !

Vows in the night, so fierce and unavailing !

Stings of my shame and passion of my tears !

But Jesus had no sense of this regret. As from the hill of Calvary He looked on His life amongst men, His understanding lit and quickened by something of the coming glory, Jesus could triumphantly cry, "It is complete !" He was conscious of nothing left undone in all the will of God for Him. He had no mistake to regret, no omission over which to grieve, no tragic memory of some impatience or indiscretion. No moment of life had been wasted, nor had any task been done in other than a perfect way. Had He another life to live for man, He could not have bettered what He had done, but would have lived it in the same perfect and blameless way. There was never in Jesus that longing that comes to us all for another chance, for we could do so much better. What He had done was perfectly complete. Our lives and memories are so made up of regrets for things we have done, and others we have left undone, that it is almost impossible for us to conceive the intense joy and satisfaction that must have been in the heart of Jesus, and which enabled Him to endure the Cross, and despise the shame.

I am sure that part of the glory that Jesus saw through the gloom of the Cross was due to the

The Conquest of the Gloom

fact that He was conscious that by His death He was forever *opening a way whereby all mankind might come to God*. For Jesus was not as others of the world's religious teachers, a mere director of mankind to some new way of approach to God. He claims that He *is* the Way. And so we understand why the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus as "the forerunner, the author, the perfecter, and the Captain of salvation." Dr. Moffat's translation brings out the full suggestiveness of the word "captain" when he renders it as "Pioneer of salvation." Jesus blazed the trail to God. He discovered a way for man that had never been known or conceived before. That passion for discovery, that has burned in the hearts of men from time immemorial, and which has carried them over flood and field bringing light and knowledge and liberty into the whole world—that passion had its selfless perfection in the Son of God. And when Jesus saw that, as Pioneer of the way to God, He must climb Calvary and a Cross, there was no turning to an easier road, but His life was gladly given as the supreme price for the opened Way. Therefore, in the words of the writer, Jesus became a Way that was "new and living." To open that way cost life, and in treading that way men are finding Life for evermore. In this was His joy.

There was also this to sustain Jesus, that He knew that His perfect life, His sacrificial death and victorious resurrection were to give to man the *highest revelation of the Father*, and to win for the Son the *perpetual adoration* of all mankind. As He

The Glory that Outshone the Gloom

stood among men He had cried, "All ye that labour and are heavy laden, come unto Me!" He longed to help the weak and the stricken and the sinning. But His best efforts to do so in the days of His flesh were limited by misunderstanding and worldliness on their part, and by His own self-adopted humanity. But now His death and resurrection were to arrest the attention of all men. The Cross showed the depths of His love, and the empty tomb its power.

And so the burdened would seek His aid, and share His yoke. The life empty because of some great sorrow, would now find unfailing comfort in His spoiling of death and His victory over the grave. The sin-stained soul, conscious of guilt and brokenness, would find its way to the foot of His Cross and see there the assurance of forgiveness and power. A world of needy, tempted and weary men and women would now find in Him their all. He was to be for ever the highest and best and purest and most loving object of adoring faith. No conception of God, or salvation, or purity, or goodness was hereafter to be complete except as found in Jesus. Was not this part of the "joy set before Him"? Was it not worth it all to gain this place in the affection and adoration of mankind? Jesus thought it was, and so the glory outshone the gloom.



III

Busy—Here and There

THE story told in 1 Kings 20 : 22—43 is an interesting and dramatic one. Ahab's disobedience in sparing Benhadad was brought home to him in a vivid and truly prophetic way, and the judgment he passed so glibly on the careless guard was turned upon himself with convicting directness. But it is not so much the story as the principle in verse 40 that calls for comment. "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone," or, "He was not." The whole story, as culminating in this verse, is a parable enshrining a truth which we would do well to learn in these days of modern life with its multitudinous tasks.

"Thy servant was *busy*—and he was not." And so I note that in the *midst of work and effort* the opportunities and highest privileges of life may slip unnoticed away. We do not know those tasks with which the guarding soldier was occupied. They were probably perfectly legitimate ones. He did not give way to faithless sleep, nor did he leave his prisoner totally unguarded for any length of time. He was not lazy or, in intent, careless. He was *busy*, and in the midst of all his business the man was gone. The five foolish virgins in the parable of Christ lost their opportunity and their high honour because of their thoughtless sleep.

Busy—Here and There

The door was closed upon the slothful, for, "as they slumbered and slept, the bridegroom came." But here is a different case, and for many, a much more significant fact.—"Thy servant was *busy*, and he was gone!" Yes, busy; but the one task he should have done was neglected, and all his business but added to his guilt. He had left undone the one thing he should have done. He had thought his time well occupied, only to find that his occupation was preoccupation, and in the midst of it his one opportunity of proving his faithfulness was gone for ever.

But further we read that he was busy in a particular kind of way when his prisoner vanished. He was busy "here and there." He was not wholly absorbed in some one great task, but in numerous insignificant ones. Possibly he was attending to his wounds received in the battle, washing and binding them up. Then he looked over his weapons or satisfied his hunger and thirst. There would also be the spoils of war to collect all about him, for we read that he was guarding the prisoner in the midst of the battlefield. All these were interesting and necessary tasks, which kept him pleasantly occupied, and all the time he had his eye on the prisoner lying bound and silent. He did not wholly neglect his duty, but he did not give his whole thought and attention to it. And so his prisoner was not so helpless as he imagined, for as the guard was "busy here and there," he loosened his bonds, watched for his opportunity, and vanished.

The soldier's mistake lay just there—he had one supreme duty to fulfil, but he dabbled in many.

The Conquest of the Gloom

There could be only one proof of his faithfulness, but he imagined that all these minor tasks would not really interfere with his main one. His efforts were diffuse, not concentrated. He interpreted St. Paul's maxim "this one thing I do" as "these many things I can do," and as "he was busy here and there, he was gone."

What a parable of much Christian service to-day. Our highest privileges and opportunities are not usually lost through sloth, but by being "busy here and there," not by occupation, but by pre-occupation. We are sidetracked from some main task of life by the many and seemingly necessary and legitimate calls upon our time. This, said Jesus, was the mistake made by those called to the wedding feast of the king's son. They all had so much to do, one on his land, another with his stock, and a third in his home, that the supreme opportunity was simply crowded out. They realized the honour and dignity conferred upon them by the invitation, and, had there been time, they would have been quite glad to have accepted it, but, before they knew it to be so, they were for ever excluded from the royal banquet, and their places were taken by those who set everything aside to obey the king's call.

No follower of Jesus is exempt from this peril. It faces the Christian business man, the lay worker, the Christian preacher and the missionary, and it operates continually just along the line which has been mentioned. We are daily losing the highest because we are preoccupied with the trivial. Every moment we are busy with many things, and the "one thing needful" somehow eludes us. It

Busy—Here and There

seems impossible to escape from these side calls of life—they are so insistent, and oftentimes good and necessary. But they are not to be compared with the accomplishment of that highest task to which God has called us all, the nature of which each must discover and interpret. Some one has said that “preoccupation is the most common form of failure,” and that holds true in the spiritual realm. The modern danger is not that we shall become absorbed in any single great endeavour, but that we shall dissipate the energies of life in a multitude of minor objectives, and then learn too late that there is neither power nor time left to reach that shining pinnacle of achievement which was meant to be the crown of life.

Think of this in connection with *modern home life*. The abiding value and highest privilege of the home is surely the training of the young in the worthy things of life. If the home fails here, it fails completely and finally. Yet to-day the home is in danger of becoming simply a boarding house where children are clothed and fed, but recreation is enjoyed, and friendships, ideals and habits are formed outside the circle of the home which was meant to be the safeguard and the guide of youth. And why is this? Is it not often because of the fact that parents are busy here and there? The calls of business are so complex and numerous that the father has hardly time to see his children, much less to associate with them in a way so necessary to character-building. The duties of society are just as insistent on the mother. There is no time for meeting around the family altar. That mutual

The Conquest of the Gloom

companionship between parent and child, which is the only abiding basis of love and respect, is crowded out by outside interests, and too late the tragedy is revealed that as those, about whom the home is centred, are "busy here and there" the children are gone, and youth has passed for ever.

This is true also of those *ideals of life* with which we set out. How radiant they were when first we yielded all to One who had drawn us by His life and love! How sure we were that nothing should interfere with the "morning watch," or break in on our communion with our Lord. How simple was our faith in His daily presence within us by His Holy Spirit! What songs of praise hymned themselves into life's dreariest duties! How we longed for holiness and strove for purity!

And now?—The busy years have passed, and every hour has had its task. Hither and thither have we been called in the way of duty. Are those ideals as high and radiant now? Or, must we confess that as we have been "busy here and there" they have dimmed into insignificance? They have not really gone as *ideals*, for they still shine on the far horizons of life and in our best moments we turn wistfully towards them. But, somehow, as daily experiences, they have gone. We never meant it to be so. We never imagined it would be so easy to forget the way of communion, or to lose the songs of Zion. But life was so full. We were so very busy here and there at tasks that seemed so urgent and so essential, that the audience-chamber of the King saw us not. It was easier to work than to pray; easier to be busy than to commune.

Busy—Here and There

Again it is true of our call to *service for Christ*. Whether we are called to service as a ministry of healing or teaching or preaching, or whether it be service for Christ in some other occupation, the ideal of Jesus must ever be in the forefront of our endeavour. Christ defined service in terms of *witnessing* and *winning*, of *telling* about Him, and *drawing* men to Him. We are in danger of losing the simplicity of His ideal in the multiplicity and complexity of those duties which are looked upon as necessary to modern Christian service. We have to be "busy here and there" if we are to meet the needs of the situation, and live up to the organisations we have created. Very few can give themselves to the undisturbed pursuit of any one task. And in this very fact lies the hidden peril—that we shall let Christ's ideal of personal witnessing and personal winning gradually fall into the background of our thought and endeavour till it is almost completely neglected. We become preoccupied with varied smaller tasks, and seldom have time to open our lips in simple and direct testimony to Him Whom we seek to serve. We have scarcely time to make a sustained endeavour to bring a soul into touch with Christ. Is this an overstatement? We shall know for ourselves if we will but test our service by the touchstone of Christ's expressed ideal. Yet we never meant to forget His way. We started with His command ringing in our ears. We determined to "preach the Gospel to every creature." We dedicated our lives to drawing men to Christ. Yet, somehow, "busy here and there," the vision has faded.

The Conquest of the Gloom

I fear the prisoner who escaped on the battlefield was never recaptured. He would see to that. The soldier's grave error was final. But I am very sure that if, in the past, high ideals of home and holiness and communion and service have been vanishing before the press of many duties, those ideals can be recovered, if we turn to Christ in faith and humility.



IV

Graven Hands

WITH words of assurance the Prophet Isaiah sought to comfort and encourage the people of Israel. He tried to make clear to them that the tribulations through which they were passing were not a sign of the forgetfulness of God, or that He had forsaken them. A time was coming when they would enter into a rich experience of God's providing care, for they were His children whom He could never forget. Then comes that vivid and expressive statement, "I have graven thee on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49 : 26). This seems almost unrelated to the main theme of the passage, and yet, when we look at it more closely, we find that the suggestions it contains are helpful and far-reaching.

It would seem that the prophet in this expression symbolises the old custom of tattooing the form of a god or loved one upon the hand or arm or body. He applies this to God in what is, of course, an anthropomorphism, and claims that, far from forgetting His people, God has inscribed them indelibly upon His hands. Would it not have been a stronger and more comforting statement had the words read, "I have graven thee upon my *heart*" ? Yet in view of the particular situation to be met and in view of one or two points which I hope will emerge in the course of our study, the "graven hands of God" is an expression full of deep spirit-

ual significance. At the outset it is worthy of note that the words read, "I have graven *thee*." Not merely thy name, or thy form, but THEE. The whole individual with his needs, weakness, sorrows, perplexities, sins, circumstances—the composite whole that goes to complete the individual personality—all this God has engraven upon the palms of His hands.

A careful comparison of the way this expression "the hands of God" is used in Scripture bring to light much that is full of deep spiritual suggestion. I find first of all that the "Graven hand" is symbol of REMEMBRANCE. It was this thought above all else that the prophet wished to make clear to the Jews. They were losing heart in the national struggle. How could they be the people of God when it seemed as if He had forgotten and forsaken! So Isaiah calls them to listen to the Divine voice carrying comfort and assurance. "Fear not! As the lover graves the form of his beloved upon his hand, so have I graven thee, O Israel. Thou art in the place of everlasting remembrance, ever before me with all thy needs and woes, never out of sight, never separated, ever in the place of my perpetual contemplation."

We too need ever to remind ourselves of the truth enshrined in the symbolism of the "graven hands of God." Never can the believer pass outside that sphere in which God knows, and sees, and contemplates the needs of the individual soul. His care and love and consideration for man is not based on mere sentiment, but is a matter of understanding and appreciation of the needs of mankind.

He can never forget because we are ever before Him. The very hands outstretched with blessing and beneficence are graven hands, bearing the marks of His perfect love and remembrance. His gifts to us, or these things which are withheld from us, are dictated by no caprice on the one hand, or thoughtless prodigality on the other, but are given or withheld as the result of perfect knowledge guided by perfect love. The secrets of the heart, the aspirations of the soul, the longings for holiness, the burden of the task, the earnest desire for fruitful service, the strivings within and the wars without—all these and everything else that goes to make up the ego, I understand to be before my Heavenly Father in the place of most intimate remembrance for He says, "I have graven *thee* on the palms of my hands."

Again we find that the "Hand of God" is used as a symbol of POWER "Thy right hand hath gotten Thee the victory." (Psalm 98 : 1.) And when we bring together these two ideas, we must conclude that we are graven on hands of power. In other words it has pleased God not simply to put power at the disposal of His servants, but to *engrave* them, to establish them perpetually in the place of divine might. In the sphere of Christian service how often does the cry arise from earnest souls, "O for more power to serve! O that in me the divine resources might be made manifest!" We long for this with a longing that is pain, for we see that unless in and through us the power of God be released on the problems and relationships and service of to-day, victory will never be ours.

The Conquest of the Gloom

Yet is there not in this symbolism a helpful suggestion as to relationship to the power of God? It is not an entity, an endowment, a thing to be acquired apart from the source of power, God Himself. "Power belongeth unto the Lord," and apart from Him there is no acquiring of it. To have power we must have God; or, as is the more correct way of expressing this, for God to be able to reveal His power through us, He must have more of us—a more regal sway, a more complete control and a more implicit obedience. He has graven us, placed us, secured us permanently in the right hand of His power, and as we abide there, His strong hand upon us with its gracious guiding and constraint, we shall discover anew what it means to "dwell in the secret place of the most High."

In the Book of the Revelation, chapter two and verse one, we read of the exalted Christ that "He holdeth the seven stars in His right hand." From the context we discover this to be symbol of sustaining CARE. These verses do not tell of the eternal character of the exalted Son, but they describe His present occupation with relation to His church on earth. For the very situation of discouragement and tribulation which the prophet Isaiah tried to meet was that which existed at the time of St. John's writing. The church was persecuted, attacked and dispersed. Opposition grew without and dissension within till many were in the depths of despair. Had Christ in the glories of His exaltation and amid the adoration of the hosts of Heaven forgotten His church on earth?

St. John's reply is perfect in its comfort and dignity and hope. Christ's present work is to hold and keep holding the stars of the churches in His right hand of power. This, and this alone is His immediate occupation, and, as it were, only His "left hand is free for other tasks." Darkness there may be, perplexity and persecution there will be, but the church, weak as she is, is yet a star in the divine firmament whose brightness and stability are guaranteed by Him whose right hand supports her.

Builders and members of the church in India, would that we could grasp this! He, the exalted, glorified Saviour of the World, holds this church in His right hand. Stars of East and West in the firmament of His divine purpose for the world, are all held fast and sure by the hand that never fails. Whatever there may be of opposition from without and imperfection within, let us with deliberate abandon believe in the future of the church, work for her prosperity, and pray for her wider union. There is verily no strength in us to hold steady and true, but the star is in *His* hand, and all the machinations of men, all the concerted opposition of those who as yet do not know and love Him can never pluck that star from His secure hold.

But there is an all-sufficient reason why the divine hand is a place of remembrance and power and sustaining care. We read that the words of the risen Christ to all who doubted were, "Behold my Hands!" Those pierced hands were to Christ, and have been to the world, the final and indubitable proof of the remembrance, the power, and the

The Conquest of the Gloom

Yet is there not in this symbolism a helpful suggestion as to relationship to the power of God? It is not an entity, an enduement, a thing to be acquired apart from the source of power, God Himself. "Power belongeth unto the Lord," and apart from Him there is no acquiring of it. To have power we must have God; or, as is the more correct way of expressing this, for God to be able to reveal His power through us, He must have more of us—a more regal sway, a more complete control and a more implicit obedience. He has graven us, placed us, secured us permanently in the right hand of His power, and as we abide there, His strong hand upon us with its gracious guiding and constraint, we shall discover anew what it means to "dwell in the secret place of the most High."

In the Book of the Revelation, chapter two and verse one, we read of the exalted Christ that "He holdeth the seven stars in His right hand." From the context we discover this to be symbol of sustaining CARE. These verses do not tell of the eternal character of the exalted Son, but they describe His present occupation with relation to His church on earth. For the very situation of discouragement and tribulation which the prophet Isaiah tried to meet was that which existed at the time of St. John's writing. The church was persecuted, attacked and dispersed. Opposition grew without and dissension within till many were in the depths of despair. Had Christ in the glories of His exaltation and amid the adoration of the hosts of Heaven forgotten His church on earth?

St. John's reply is perfect in its comfort and dignity and hope. Christ's present work is to hold and keep holding the stars of the churches in His right hand of power. This, and this alone is His immediate occupation, and, as it were, only His "left hand is free for other tasks." Darkness there may be, perplexity and persecution there will be, but the church, weak as she is, is yet a star in the divine firmament whose brightness and stability are guaranteed by Him whose right hand supports her.

Builders and members of the church in India, would that we could grasp this! He, the exalted, glorified Saviour of the World, holds this church in His right hand. Stars of East and West in the firmament of His divine purpose for the world, are all held fast and sure by the hand that never fails. Whatever there may be of opposition from without and imperfection within, let us with deliberate abandon believe in the future of the church, work for her prosperity, and pray for her wider union. There is verily no strength in us to hold steady and true, but the star is in *His* hand, and all the machinations of men, all the concerted opposition of those who as yet do not know and love Him can never pluck that star from His secure hold.

But there is an all-sufficient reason why the divine hand is a place of remembrance and power and sustaining care. We read that the words of the risen Christ to all who doubted were, "Behold my Hands!" Those pierced hands were to Christ, and have been to the world, the final and indubitable proof of the remembrance, the power, and the

care of God. How deeply they were graven ! How they were crushed and pierced and broken as the sins and woes of a world were written in blood upon them ! Even a resurrection could not erase those indelible marks of sacrificial love. They were honourable wounds, gracious tokens that God had indeed "graven us on the palms of His hands," and the risen Lord as He confronted doubt and wonder could only say, "Behold my Hands ! " He expected that these redeeming wounds would be proof enough of His person and His claims.

How can we proclaim the remembrance or the power or the care of God unless we make those pierced hands the centre of our message ? Apart from the Cross and its distinctive message, the world of mankind has no key to unlock the problems of life. As, with the Master, we too stand before the doubt and speculation and opposition around, with clearer voice than ever we must proclaim, " Behold His Hands ! "



The Value of Faith

IN the 28th chapter of Isaiah at the 16th verse we find a very significant statement about faith : "He that believeth shall not make haste." This follows upon the declaration by the Prophet as to the laying of the tried and precious foundation stone as the only basis of security. We find that there are several renderings of this statement concerning faith or belief. Dr. McFadyen in his "Isaiah in Modern Speech" translates in this way, "He that beliebeth shall not give way," and a third rendering is in the Septuagint version, "He that believeth shall not be put to shame." Thus if we gather the ideas as expressed by these three renderings, we find the value of faith thus defined. The leisure of faith ; the staying power of faith ; the confidence of faith. Let us look at these in fuller detail.

1. *The Leisure of Faith.* He whose trust is in God shall not be in a hurry. This surely sounds unorthodox in the face of modern standards of efficiency. Speed, production, capacity—these are the watchwords of to-day, and we are in grave danger of carrying them over too completely into the realm of spiritual experience and Christian service. We look at nature and see that in His highest works God has not been in a hurry. God's profoundest creations have taken time. So in the realms of art, those productions which have left

the greatest impress on the world's thought and admiration, have not been created in a day, but are the result of labour, protracted thought, and sustained endeavour.

In the realm of the Spirit it is very true that faith has this value for us—it keeps from hurry, from feverish endeavour for an easy and spectacular success, and gives us leisure of spirit. When our faith is founded in Him whose “mills grind slowly” but surely, we shall find that the clamorous calls of insistent duty, the eager and wholly laudable desire to see spiritual results, the urgent need of those for whom we labour—all these things shall not be able to disturb our souls, or rob us of that inward repose without which life and effort will soon be exhausted.

There are several lines along which “He that believeth shall not make haste.” One is this—we shall not make haste to *modify our message*. There is a danger to-day that, through eagerness to win acceptance for our message we shall somewhat modify it to make it (as we fondly imagine) more acceptable to non-Christians, and more in accord with their ideals, forms of belief, and religious genius. Surely this is a very real peril, and the peril is in this—that by modification we reach inadequacy. We may so minimise the distinctive and redemptive message of the Cross that it is not the power of God unto salvation. To modify the message of forgiveness through the atoning death of Christ, is to emasculate it; to omit it, is to paralyse our evangel. God, who knew the need of the soul of the world, has provided this as the

heart of the Christian message, and whatever be our motive in its omission or its modification, we shall soon arrive at the tragic realisation that the gospel we have thought fit to proclaim is inadequate to the real needs of the situation, and we have been spending our strength in vain.

This was precisely the message of the prophet. His nation was seeking to meet a situation by alliance with non-Jewish nations, and Isaiah warned them of the inadequacy of such endeavour. I was, he said, like trying to lie in a bed that is too short, and cover oneself with a blanket too narrow,—a vivid and wholly pertinent picture of inadequacy. No. Only the full-orbed message of the gospel is adequate for the needs of this or any land, and he whose faith is in God, in His wisdom and in His purpose for the world will not be hurried into any such paralysing modification of the unique and distinctive message of the gospel, but will with patience and restfulness of soul, “declare the whole council of God.”

Again “he that believeth shall not make haste” to modify the high ideal of *what the Church of Christ should be*. We shall not hasten to a cheap and spectacular success which makes the Church dependent on mere statistics of baptisms. In all our building of “His Body” we must ever remember that it must be worthy of the “Head.” So we labour to lay the foundations deep and sure, not grudging the years of unhurried endeavour, remembering that we build for Him, that we may provide that vehicle through which He can win the world to Himself.

Then, too, “he that believeth” shall see to it

The Conquest of the Gloom

that he has leisure to attend to the *culture of his own soul*. What a tragedy it is to see the Christian worker so feverishly engaged in making his work a success that he omits that very means by which alone that success for which he longs can be achieved! The demands of Christian service, the trials of faith and of patience, the antagonisms of the way—all these are so grave and real, that the worker must at all costs take leisure to grow in grace, to drink deeply and unhurriedly at the wells of salvation, and to fortify his spirit by communion. This leisure will be his "who believes," for faith will enable him to see that more will be accomplished by a soul in contact with God and strengthened by the ministries of the Holy Spirit, than by the most agitated self-effort.

2. The *Staying Power of Faith* is suggested by Dr. McFadyen's translation—"He that believeth shall not give way." In other words, faith in God provides for the emergency strains of life, whatever those strains may be. It is the unexpected demand, the sudden crisis which often reveals the essential strength or weakness of our faith. We saw it in the war. Young men and women from good homes, sheltered from childhood from the sterner realities and the fiercer temptations of life, but without a real faith in God, were suddenly thrown into an atmosphere where the ordinary conventions of life were loosened, and where the relationships and ideals that had held them with a somewhat precarious hold, were at a discount. Many, alas, could not take the strain, and because their faith was insecure, they gave way.

I think this was what Christ really meant by the parable of the men who built their houses, the one on the sand and the other on the rock. You can see them as they commence. The man on the sand had his foundations dug and his wall well up before the other on the rocky hillside above him had even levelled his site, and when the lower house was practically completed, the builder on the height was still struggling patiently with the stubborn rock. You can imagine the owner of the house on the sand tending his garden and beautifying his surroundings, then sitting at his ease watching with tolerant amusement, his friend still building on the rock. But the testing time came, as it is sure to come to all. The summer sun and the bright days that had seemed to justify building on the sand passed, and on came the winter with its gales and torrents and storms, and in the time of strain and testing, when the elements were loosed against the effort of man, I think I see the builder on the rock gaze in dismay and horror at the catastrophe below, as garden and house and builder were swept for ever away in the resistless torrent.

It is the strain that reveals our faith. It may be a great sorrow that has darkened the home. It may be sickness or incapacity that lays its testing hand upon us. It may be financial ruin or loss, or it may be simply the daily wear and tear of service—that grinding monotony of duty which is the lot of all, that reveals the calibre of our faith. I care not what the strain may be—faith has this value, that it enables us not to give way.

3. The *Confidence of Faith* is suggested for “He

that believeth shall not be put to shame." This is the New Testament teaching with regard to sin. The shame of sin now, and that shame which the sinner, if unpardoned must feel hereafter, can be dealt with by faith in Jesus Christ and His work for us. It is even so with regard to prayer. For Jesus assures us that God is the perfect and heavenly Father, and as such is pledged not to shame His children when they ask in faith believing. And finally, faith in relation to service is the secret of effectiveness, and that means by which we shall be kept true to our high calling. When we stand in the presence of our Lord and Master, only two things can ever make us ashamed,—unforgiven sin and unfaithful service. But faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit means forgiveness and cleansing and that adequate empowerment for service, which is the right and privilege of every follower of Christ.



VI

The Sin of Silence

DUSK was falling on the city of Samaria and on the besieging hosts of Syria, as four men made their way stealthily towards the city gates. It had previously been their begging ground, for they were lepers (2 Kings 7 : 1-11). But now the plight of the seemingly doomed city was so terrible, that even these unfortunates were at an end of their resources. The siege had been a close and prolonged one, and from the records it appears that the people of Samaria were reduced to terrible straits. Refuse of all kinds was eaten, and even cannibalism of a most revolting type was resorted to. If this was the plight of the better classes what chances had these four lepers ?

Extremity made them bold, and they came to the conclusion that it would be better to cast themselves on the tender mercy of the enemy, rather than to endure the torture of starvation within the walls of the doomed city. It was just possible that the Syrians, beholding their dread disease and pitiable condition, might spare and feed them. With this thought in their minds, as twilight deepened into night, they slipped past the rather lax guard at the city gates, and were soon lost in the gloom of no-man's land. Weakened by starvation, and crippled by disease, their progress towards the besieging force was necessarily slow, but

as time passed and they remained unchallenged by the enemy outposts, a strange wonder grew upon them. Nearer and nearer they came till the ghostly outlines of tents became visible in the darkness. There they paused, listening for voices and the usual noises of an encampment, but all was silent as the night about them. It was all very strange, they thought.

There was a whispered consultation in the darkness, and then the bolder spirits advanced to a tent and, lifting the flap, gazed upon an amazing sight. A feeble lamp flickered within revealing a strange scene. The furnishings of the tent were scattered in confusion, and remnants of a meal lay about the floor, while garments and vessels had been flung recklessly here and there. In a moment, with subdued ejaculations of wonder, these famished men had flung themselves upon the remnants of the food and devoured them. With hunger unsatisfied, they hurried to another tent to find the same condition of affairs. Their physical wants satisfied to repletion, they turned their attention to the spoils which lay in profusion about them, hiding what they could not carry.

Suddenly some dormant and higher sense awoke within their souls. They had not had time yet to think of the famished city, for their own needs had been so urgent. But as the fact dawned upon them that the enemy had fled and that there was plenty for every man, woman and child, a sense of shame fell upon them, and one voiced the feelings of all when he exclaimed, "This is a day of good-tidings, and we hold our peace. We do not well. Let us

go and tell the King's household." So as the watchmen on the city wall gazed out fearfully in the early grey of the coming dawn, they were startled to find the four lepers whom they knew of old clamouring for admission and claiming that they had the gladdest news Samaria had ever heard, news of victory and plenty. Such in truth was the sum and substance of their good-tidings. Something had happened, and the dreaded enemy was no more. There was not a Syrian in sight, and what was more, there was provision for all. Young and old, rich and poor, women and little children were delivered from need and hunger and death. It was indeed wonderful news, and they lost no time in telling it to the astonished and almost incredulous city.

I venture to see in this whole incident an illustration of a much needed emphasis to-day. This is a day of "Good-tidings," and we dare not hold our peace. And the good-tidings we have for India and for the world, are they not in principle the very message of the four lepers of old—victory and provision, Christ and the Holy Spirit, Calvary and Pentecost? Christianity is primarily a gospel not a philosophy; an evangel, not a theology; good-news, not dogma. That which made the apostolic church so invincible, and that which has characterized every true revival of religion down the course of history, is that the humblest follower of Jesus awoke to the fact that the good news of victory through Christ and power through the Holy Spirit had to be told. Silence was sin. Indeed they could not keep silent about what they had

as time passed and they remained unchallenged by the enemy outposts, a strange wonder grew upon them. Nearer and nearer they came till the ghostly outlines of tents became visible in the darkness. There they paused, listening for voices and the usual noises of an encampment, but all was silent as the night about them. It was all very strange, they thought.

There was a whispered consultation in the darkness, and then the bolder spirits advanced to a tent and, lifting the flap, gazed upon an amazing sight. A feeble lamp flickered within revealing a strange scene. The furnishings of the tent were scattered in confusion, and remnants of a meal lay about the floor, while garments and vessels had been flung recklessly here and there. In a moment, with subdued ejaculations of wonder, these famished men had flung themselves upon the remnants of the food and devoured them. With hunger unsatisfied, they hurried to another tent to find the same condition of affairs. Their physical wants satisfied to repletion, they turned their attention to the spoils which lay in profusion about them, hiding what they could not carry.

Suddenly some dormant and higher sense awoke within their souls. They had not had time yet to think of the famished city, for their own needs had been so urgent. But as the fact dawned upon them that the enemy had fled and that there was plenty for every man, woman and child, a sense of shame fell upon them, and one voiced the feelings of all when he exclaimed, "This is a day of good-tidings, and we hold our peace. We do not well. Let us

The Sin of Silence

go and tell the King's household." So as the watchmen on the city wall gazed out fearfully in the early grey of the coming dawn, they were startled to find the four lepers whom they knew of old clamouring for admission and claiming that they had the gladdest news Samaria had ever heard, news of victory and plenty. Such in truth was the sum and substance of their good-tidings. Something had happened, and the dreaded enemy was no more. There was not a Syrian in sight, and what was more, there was provision for all. Young and old, rich and poor, women and little children were delivered from need and hunger and death. It was indeed wonderful news, and they lost no time in telling it to the astonished and almost incredulous city.

I venture to see in this whole incident an illustration of a much needed emphasis to-day. This is a day of "Good-tidings," and we dare not hold our peace. And the good-tidings we have for India and for the world, are they not in principle the very message of the four lepers of old—victory and provision, Christ and the Holy Spirit, Calvary and Pentecost? Christianity is primarily a gospel not a philosophy; an evangel, not a theology; good-news, not dogma. That which made the apostolic church so invincible, and that which has characterized every true revival of religion down the course of history, is that the humblest follower of Jesus awoke to the fact that the good news of victory through Christ and power through the Holy Spirit had to be told. Silence was sin. Indeed they could not keep silent about what they had

The Conquest of the Gloom

seen and heard. Thus felt those four lepers as they surveyed the deserted camp of the Syrians. To say nothing about this abundance in the face of the appalling need of the dying city, this were sin. The groans of the dying and the crying of little children sounded still in their ears, and they could do none else than proclaim their good news. They knew the need, and they had found a source of satisfaction—the very news the city needed.

Of course, if there should be some lingering doubt as to whether India, with her ancient cultures and her highly developed systems of philosophy, really needs the good news of the Cross, then we shall most surely be silent. There is nothing so quickly seals the lips and silences the testimony as the feeling that India does not need the distinctive message of Christ. Herein lies the peril of all movements and all outlooks which seek to minimize the deep heart-need of the non-Christian world. If India does not need the good news of victory through the Cross and power through the indwelling Spirit, which Christianity alone can proclaim, then the *raison d'être* of witness-bearing is gone, lips that should tell the glad evangel will be closed, a chilling paralysis will settle on the Church of Christ, and her very existence as His Body will be jeopardized.

We need to discover anew the *simplicity* of telling the good news as the personal task of the humblest member of the body of Christ. We hire preachers and pay our pastors as though we think that we can bear witness by proxy. It is easier to organize a bazaar than to lead a street preaching party. It is

The Sin of Silence

better form to arrange a social function for your non-Christian friend than to tell him quietly what Christ means to you. What infinite wisdom it was that led Christ to give this method and injunction to His hesitant and fearful followers, the method of personal witness in which every one could share, and which neither heights nor depths, principalities nor powers could ever restrain or subdue.

In that day of good-tidings for these four men to remain silent was, they felt, attended with danger. "Some evil would surely come upon them." Possibly they feared that, with the light of day, they would be discovered and punished for their heartless conduct. At any rate they were rightly convinced that there would be a serious penalty attached to silence. In other words, the sin of silence brings its retribution in the deprivation of the silent one. Samaria would certainly, when the day dawned, have discovered the good news, but the four lepers would have had no part in the joy of telling. The most outcast and pitied men in Samaria had a word for the King's ear. Those who had condescendingly tossed the beggar a coin, now hung on their life-giving message. Theirs was a message which gave strength to their crippled limbs and a note of real authority to their voices as they thundered on the city gate at the dawn of the day.

And think of the recollections that would be theirs in the days of agony ahead. I can imagine those four men, now living in comparative comfort from the spoils of the Syrians, meeting now

The Conquest of the Gloom

and then, their bodies diseased and their days a pain, and their theme would be of how they brought the good news to Samaria—the news of victory and plenty. They had been the saviours of their city, and there was a glory in the memory of it that would never fade.

It is just here that the sin of silence has its punishment. There is no joy on earth or in heaven to compare with that of being the mouth-piece of God's good news. To see the light of knowledge dawning, to hear the stammered prayer, to behold the changing life and character, and to know that in His mercy God has used your word and life to effect this—the joy of such an experience is something beyond words, and is surely an echo of that of which Jesus spoke when He told of the joy of the angels of heaven. But when the word is not spoken and the witness not borne, when the good news of victory and provision is not proclaimed in a personal way by the follower of Jesus, the retribution is swift in a lost assurance and in an absence of that deep joy which is the crown of Christian experience.

What was the authority of those four men? It was the authority of a personal experience. They had been there, had seen, had tasted, had handled. They spoke with no dubiety or timidity, for they were *sure*. They had something to say, and they said it authoritatively. Here is the secret of witness-bearing and of telling the good news. Alas, how many followers of Jesus are silent about the things of God simply because they have nothing to tell! They have never really felt His touch of power, or

The Sin of Silence

the thrill of forgiveness, or looked into the face of their Lord. They have never seen nor tested, nor handled the Word of Life, and so there is no urge to tell, and no authority in the telling.

The Psalmist says, "My soul, be thou silent unto Jehovah." And in *this* silence is to be found the gift of richest speech. To wait on Him that we may have a deeper experience of Him and His love and His purpose for the world—this is the place to rekindle the soul. If we are "silent unto Jehovah" we shall not be silent unto the world in this day of the good news of God.



VII

His Will

THERE is no expression more often on the lips of the believer than this, "the will of God." It is his highest conception of good, his abiding refuge in all the bewildering and faith-testing experiences of life, and the ultimate test of the success or failure of his service for the Kingdom of God. Both Old and New Testaments are full of references to the divine will for the individual or for the world, and that will in its highest manifestation is given meaning and content in the Christian message of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. In the realm of personal conduct, and in the directing of life-effort in service, the interpretation of that will must ever be the task and the privilege of the children of the Father. To know His will, and to seek to do it with humility and perseverance is the highest secret of joy and usefulness in the Christian life. To miss His will through prayerlessness or disobedience or preoccupation with the world, is to fail where failure is fatal and complete. No achievement can have abiding value if it is out of line with the Divine will for the individual and the world. This was the central tragedy of the rich young ruler. He had so much that was admirable—position, wealth, spiritual perception and a brave earnestness that carried him to the feet of Jesus. Yet to the will of

His Will

God for him as expressed in Christ's twofold command, "Go, and give," and "Come, and take," he would not give obedience, and he "went away grieved" with a grief that nothing would ever be able to assuage till he fell in penitence and submission before Him Whose will he had spurned.

In the first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul uses this expression, "His Will," in three different settings. He writes about the "good pleasure of His will," the "mystery of His will," and the "counsel of His will." In all, the Divine will is held forth as supreme, and is described in a threefold aspect as good pleasure, mystery and counsel.

He speaks in verse 5 of the "Good pleasure of His will," and the word contains the idea of satisfaction and beneficence. His will is always kind, and, in the ultimate, is that which alone can satisfy. It satisfies because it is the kind and good pleasure of a loving Father. God's will for His children can never be else than beneficent, for it is the pure expression of a purpose which has love as its *motive*, love as its *means*, and love as its *end*. His will is love simply because He is love. Yet it is just here that, in our weakness, we so often fail to cling to the fact of the "good pleasure of His will." There was that tragic and dark cloud of sorrow which rested upon your life, and the bereavement seemed to empty the world for you. There are those periods of pain and sickness that seem so far removed from a kind and beneficent purpose. The way has been marked by financial loss that has seemed to rob life of all leisure and freedom from anxiety. Can these be any part of a loving will?

The Conquest of the Gloom

Where is there amid these shadows any light of "good pleasure?"

Thus we lose our way in bewilderment and doubt because of the *shortness* of our thinking and the *smallness* of our thinking. Time to us is measured by the passing year, and that seems good to us which brings its results within the little span of our brief day. We are so prone to want our good now, and are impatient when directed to some future hope contained within His will. And again, our conception of that which is for the highest good of the soul is so small and incomplete. We forget that "eternal weight of glory." We have had to deal so entirely with the mundane measures of life that we have no true standard by which to weigh the abiding enrichments of the Divine will which has as its aim the "perfecting of the saints."

So, amid the perplexities, the testings, and, it may be, the midnight darkness of great trial, there is a light to guide and a word to cheer. It is all the "good pleasure of His will," and all that comes to the child of God has beneficence at the heart of it, and some day, with undimmed vision and humble thankfulness we shall acknowledge it.

St. Paul speaks also of the "mystery of His will" (verse 9). We learn that this word referred originally to those secret rites by which the novitiate was received into the society. But St. Paul and other New Testament writers have used it to describe that purpose of God which to the finite mind seemed past comprehension. His will is His secret—a secret hidden from the world, dimly apprehended only by faith, and to be entered into

His Will

when we share the glory of His presence. As the New Testament writers beheld the working of His will, there were some of its manifestations which they described as mysteries—such as the plan of salvation, the Gentile inclusion, the resurrection of our Lord, the union between Christ and His Church, and as here, the all-inclusiveness of Christ. The light of many centuries of thought and experience has helped us to understand more clearly than the early Church was able to do the infinite wisdom of God, but there must ever be an unfathomable something about the divine dealing with man. When the finite mind can grasp fully the meaning of the Divine will, it ceases to be Divine. It is past comprehension simply because it is Divine, and none would ever wish it otherwise. What a deprivation of hope, what a loss in faith, what a narrowing of life's horizons, could we comprehend the purposes and see the finality of the Divine will! Nay. It is this very element of mystery and immensity about the Divine purpose that is the stay of the human spirit. Beyond the bounds of comprehension, something to be comprehended. Beyond the limits of achievement, something yet to be achieved. Beyond the seemingly impenetrable darkness, a light steady and sure. This is the whole content of saving faith. This nerves the soul for combat, purifies by hope, and gives a sure abiding place. The highest conception of Christian faith as regards the will of God is to be able to say with St. Paul, "the good pleasure and the mystery of His will," or in words already used, to abide in the assurance of the "beneficent

mystery of His will." Some day all that makes for mystery will pass away, and in the clear perception of the goal to which He has brought us, we shall comprehend the leading of His love.

Still another expression is used by St. Paul in verse 11, "The counsel of His will," and I find that this contains the ideas of "intelligent deliberation" and "advice." We are too apt to accept as axiomatic that "of God's will there is no reason but that it *is* His will." But that will, for the world and for the individual, is not an isolated decree without relation to the needs of life. His will, whether expressed in salvation or in His personal dealings with His children, is the highest expression of a reasonable, intelligent, and deliberate plan for mankind. Those Divine purposes are never marred by haste or impulsiveness, shortsightedness or misunderstanding. With complete knowledge, undimmed vision and perfect love does the Father will for His children.

But there is a further thought enshrined in the word "counsel." The will of God is the highest form of *advice*, and His purpose for mankind as a whole or for the individual is supreme wisdom and always trustworthy. I venture to suggest that we can apply this truth to those specific realms of thought and life where to-day the world needs and desires advice and light and counsel. In the realm of international affairs how persistently do men seek by conference and treaty to reach some decision which will enable the nations of the earth to live together without fear. The best brains of the world have for years advised and counselled

and conferred, and yet war in the air, on land, and on sea is possible, and mutual fear and distrust are ever breaking through the surest treaty and menacing the world.

Why not try the will of God as revealed in the teaching of Jesus as the best advice on international relations? Some one has said that Christianity cannot be said to have failed to solve the world's problems because it has never been fully tried. And this is true. We have diluted Christ's pure teaching of the way of love, and of the brotherhood of man, and of the resistance of evil by good till we cannot by any means call it the "counsel of God's will." We have, in modern language, modified the crudities of Christ's teaching on social relationships to meet the needs of modern life, when we should have sought to mould it on those old and very wise simplicities. Could we but get back to the "counsel of His will," we would find that it contained those basal principles which, when brought into operation, would solve our international problems. The fact is that every mutual arrangement and understanding which is ministering permanently to the peace of the world will be found to be the operating of those old, yet up-to-date principles of Jesus which He announced so long ago by the waters of Galilee.

Equally true is it that the will of God for His Church is the highest form of advice for her further progress. I believe firmly that there must be a re-discovery of apostolic Christianity if the Church in India, or in any other land, is to be able to face the flood of trial coming upon her. There never

mystery of His will." Some day all that makes for mystery will pass away, and in the clear perception of the goal to which He has brought us, we shall comprehend the leading of His love.

Still another expression is used by St. Paul in verse 11, "The counsel of His will," and I find that this contains the ideas of "intelligent deliberation" and "advice." We are too apt to accept as axiomatic that "of God's will there is no reason but that it *is* His will." But that will, for the world and for the individual, is not an isolated decree without relation to the needs of life. His will, whether expressed in salvation or in His personal dealings with His children, is the highest expression of a reasonable, intelligent, and deliberate plan for mankind. Those Divine purposes are never marred by haste or impulsiveness, shortsightedness or misunderstanding. With complete knowledge, undimmed vision and perfect love does the Father will for His children.

But there is a further thought enshrined in the word "counsel." The will of God is the highest form of *advice*, and His purpose for mankind as a whole or for the individual is supreme wisdom and always trustworthy. I venture to suggest that we can apply this truth to those specific realms of thought and life where to-day the world needs and desires advice and light and counsel. In the realm of international affairs how persistently do men seek by conference and treaty to reach some decision which will enable the nations of the earth to live together without fear. The best brains of the world have for years advised and counselled

His Will

and conferred, and yet war in the air, on land, and on sea is possible, and mutual fear and distrust are ever breaking through the surest treaty and menacing the world.

Why not try the will of God as revealed in the teaching of Jesus as the best advice on international relations? Some one has said that Christianity cannot be said to have failed to solve the world's problems because it has never been fully tried. And this is true. We have diluted Christ's pure teaching of the way of love, and of the brotherhood of man, and of the resistance of evil by good till we cannot by any means call it the "counsel of God's will." We have, in modern language, modified the crudities of Christ's teaching on social relationships to meet the needs of modern life, when we should have sought to mould it on those old and very wise simplicities. Could we but get back to the "counsel of His will," we would find that it contained those basal principles which, when brought into operation, would solve our international problems. The fact is that every mutual arrangement and understanding which is ministering permanently to the peace of the world will be found to be the operating of those old, yet up-to-date principles of Jesus which He announced so long ago by the waters of Galilee.

Equally true is it that the will of God for His Church is the highest form of advice for her further progress. I believe firmly that there must be a re-discovery of apostolic Christianity if the Church in India, or in any other land, is to be able to face the flood of trial coming upon her. There never

was such an age of conferences and commissions on every conceivable subject connected with church life. The Church Universal is busy advising herself, and, let us remember, doing this with much prayer and effort and expense. But where is the kindled heart ; where the passion for witness ; where the sacrificial giving ; where the victories of the Cross that marked the Apostolic Age, and has marked every true revival of religion since ? Let us seek the "counsel of His will" as revealed in victorious Christian experience throughout the ages.

Then surely for the individual life the best advice to follow is the "counsel of His will." To the young, looking out on life with wistful hope and anticipation, there lies within His will the way to certain and abiding achievement. For the strong man in the midst of life's effort the advice of the will of God will steady his stride, purify his ideals, and bring rest to his soul. And when the shadows gather in the later years, there is no resting place like the counsel of His will—always wise and tender and available.



VIII

The Anchorage that is always Safe

IT would seem that the Psalmist had moved far from those safe abiding places which mean the peace and security of the soul. But after passing through deep and troubled waters, he calls upon his soul, worn and tired by the afflictions through which he had passed, to return to its sure resting place (Psalm 116 : 7). Literally the words are, "Return unto thy rests, O my soul"—the plural of perfection and emphasis, as if he would say to his wearied spirit, "Come back from the deeps of affliction and the tempests of trial to those perfectly safe anchorages, where the fiercest storm can never harm, and where is the abiding place of safety." It was a necessary and inevitable word to address to his soul. *Necessary*, for no man of God can live a good life in the midst of unrest and peacelessness. Grace grows in the soil of peace. *Inevitable*, for the heart that has known what it is to be "stayed upon Jehovah," and has felt the calm security of the anchorage that is always safe, can never be satisfied with aught else. Can we discover from a study of this Psalm what were some of the causes of the Psalmist's restlessness?

He seems to indicate some of these in the earlier part of the Psalm. There was the *fear of death*

(verse 3), which was evidently strong upon him, binding him as with cords. When he contemplated that inevitable event, and the approaching grave, it was as if a great pain "laid hold of him." Surely this was a strange attitude for a man of God such as the Psalmist must have been. Even without the full assurance of immortality which has been born of Christ's empty tomb and resurrection message, there was surely comfort enough to preserve this Hebrew saint from a fear of death that seemed to come between him and his soul's abiding rest? Yet biography records that it is not so much the *experience* of death as the *contemplation* of it, that has perturbed the human spirit, and many who have thought with fear of the approaching change, have passed through it with quiet faith and victory. There is something so utterly final about death, that it appals us. All we know, have spoken to and loved; all that has through the years of life, woven itself into the warp and woof of our being, all that has made life a glad experience—all this is left finally and irrevocably for that which is quite unknown. No angel messenger has revealed the secrets of the Unseen. It is not that we cannot trust ourselves to a loving Father, or that the home beyond is haunted by any thought of terror. Yet the fact remains that "the sorrows of death do compass us, and the pains of the grave do find us."

Another expression used to indicate the kind of condition from which the Psalmist desired rest is in verse 6, where he says, "I was brought low." He had allowed himself to get spiritually out of condition. His was a soul unfit. Perhaps some

sin had laid a paralysing grip upon his secret life. Possibly he had neglected some plain duty, and the inevitable result of disobedience to the high calls of conscience had visited him. Perhaps he had ceased to make prayer and communion with God a central fact of faith and practice. Whatever was the cause, he was brought into a low state of spiritual health when fret, and care and peacelessness found easy lodgment, and when his whole being was open to the allurements of evil. For, as it is true of the body that a low general condition of health predisposes to infection, so, when the Psalmist was "brought low" spiritually, he found that subtle attacks were made on his assurance and peace, and even on the foundations of his faith—attacks that he had very little strength to resist.

A third indication of his trouble is found in the tenth and eleventh verses. "I was greatly afflicted, I said in my alarm, all men are a lie." Cynicism had laid its fatal grip upon him. We do not know what great afflictions led him into this sad condition. It is possible that some trusted friend had betrayed him. It may have been that some plan, upon which he had staked his faith, had fallen in ruins about him because men had been faithless. Or possibly as he looked out on the world and upon the general condition of society with its insincerities and follies, he became hopeless, for in all he seemed to see a lie and a deceit. To be in this condition of soul is a terrible and fatal thing for a man of God. Personal and social frailty we must ever acknowledge and deplore, but when we allow the unkind forces of life so to overwhelm us, that, in the acknowledg-

ment of the *fact*, we lose the vision of the possibility of redeeming grace, we have arrived at that sad place of which without exaggeration it may be said, that we are of no use to God or man. To become cynical regarding ourselves, or our brother men, or regarding our message for the world as the only hope for the regeneration of society, is to paralyse completely all real effort. We may labour for India or for any other country. We may be verbally obedient to the shibboleths of faith, and even proclaim them as preachers and teachers. But if, deep down in our heart of hearts, we find the unexpressed, yet half-definite conviction that after all very little can be expected in face of the peculiar conditions of this or any other land, and that the power of God can hardly deal with this situation—if this be our unhappy condition, let us pause, for we are drifting far away from the “anchorage that is always safe.”

So it would seem that experiences such as these had visited the Psalmist. But he was not content to accept them as inevitable. He had known too well the joy and peace of Jehovah to be content with anything less, and so he calls his soul back to those sure resting places that are undisturbed by the testings and fear of life.

The *bounty and inexhaustible grace of God* was to be his resting place (verse 7). Dr. Dale has a beautiful definition of grace in which he says: “Grace is love which passes beyond all claims to love. It is love which, after fulfilling the obligations imposed by law, has an unexhausted wealth of kindness.” In spite of the Psalmist’s unworthiness and way-

The Anchorage that is Always Safe

wardness, Jehovah had "heard" and "inclined His ear" and "preserved" and "delivered" and "loosed." This was grace and mercy indeed far above and beyond all that was deserved. And so the Psalmist was prepared to rest his soul on this amazing and unchanging fact that, exalted above all the frailty and fickleness of human nature, was the abiding and abounding goodwill of God. Amid deceit, He is trustworthy. Amid frailty, He is strong. Amid uncertainty, He is the abiding reality. Amid the fear of death, He is the eternal home.

Thus must it ever be with us too. The only anchorage that is always safe is the certainty of the love and the bounty of God, and here the most troubled spirit can find rest. "Return then to this, thy rest, O, my soul. Thou must sojourn amid the changes and perplexities and uncertainties of the world, but amidst them all here is the secret place of calm."

The other fact which brought rest to the Psalmist seems to have been his *personal attitude to this grace of God*. He considered and magnified that bounty which had dealt so graciously with him, but he fully realized that its very perfection called for a loving response on his part. That response he expresses in terms of a personal *bestowal* and a personal *appropriation*. Thus we read, "I will pay my vows unto the Lord." This may have meant for him the dedication of his life with all its responsibilities and powers to God. Jehovah was so trustable, and His grace such an abiding reality, that the only fitting response was to yield himself

The Conquest of the Gloom

to it completely. Or the expression may mean that he was conscious that all was not well between this gracious Lord and his own soul. Promises he had made had never been fulfilled. There were vows of service and sacrifice that he had never redeemed. There were sins he had never surrendered. But all this is now to be changed, and he will find his way back to the place of rest along the road of dedication.

But his attitude was to be one of *appropriation*. How deep and beautiful is the spiritual insight of these verses. "What shall I render?" cries his soul. "How can I show my gratitude for the undeserved mercies of Jehovah?" And here the world's measures and methods part company with those of the spiritual realm. The world shows its gratitude by *giving*, and the greater the gift, the richer is the expression of thankfulness. But what can the soul of man do when, in face of eternal and unmerited love and bounty, it has nothing to give? I cannot supplement completeness, nor bestow on One Who is All in All, the Source and Sum of all mercy and grace. Yet the Psalmist discovered the truth that the best way to thank God is to accept more from His gracious hand! "What shall I render? I will take the cup of salvation." I have nothing to *give*, but I have a capacity to *take*. There is no bestowal that I can make, but I can present the emptiness and need of my soul that He, Whose nature is love, and Whose highest joy is in giving, may of His fulness further enrich and endow. Then let us find rest in the appropriation of that "cup of salvation," whose ingredients are

The Anchorage that is Always Safe

forgiveness and reconciliation and peace and power, and which only He can refill: "Return to this resting place, O, my soul, where, in face of all the eternal bounty of God, thou dost give thyself and take his fulness."



to it completely. Or the expression may mean that he was conscious that all was not well between this gracious Lord and his own soul. Promises he had made had never been fulfilled. There were vows of service and sacrifice that he had never redeemed. There were sins he had never surrendered. But all this is now to be changed, and he will find his way back to the place of rest along the road of dedication.

But his attitude was to be one of *appropriation*. How deep and beautiful is the spiritual insight of these verses. "What shall I render?" cries his soul. "How can I show my gratitude for the undeserved mercies of Jehovah?" And here the world's measures and methods part company with those of the spiritual realm. The world shows its gratitude by *giving*, and the greater the gift, the richer is the expression of thankfulness. But what can the soul of man do when, in face of eternal and unmerited love and bounty, it has nothing to give? I cannot supplement completeness, nor bestow on One Who is All in All, the Source and Sum of all mercy and grace. Yet the Psalmist discovered the truth that the best way to thank God is to accept more from His gracious hand! "What shall I render? I will take the cup of salvation." I have nothing to *give*, but I have a capacity to *take*. There is no bestowal that I can make, but I can present the emptiness and need of my soul that He, Whose nature is love, and Whose highest joy is in giving, may of His fulness further enrich and endow. Then let us find rest in the appropriation of that "cup of salvation," whose ingredients are

The Anchorage that is Always Safe

forgiveness and reconciliation and peace and power, and which only He can refill: "Return to this resting place, O, my soul, where, in face of all the eternal bounty of God, thou dost give thyself and take his fulness."



The Friend of the Bridegroom

WHEN John the Baptist gave expression to that profound saying, "He must increase, and I must decrease," he must have had sure ground upon which to take his stand. He was face to face with a crisis which laid bare the very foundations of his soul's spiritual experience. No more searching test can be applied to life than that through which John was now passing. To see his personal influence and following wane day by day; to find the place formerly taken by himself filled by another upon whose words and acts the crowds hung spell-bound; to be forced into a lonely and insignificant seclusion, and to pass through this experience unscathed, with no jealousy in his soul and no bitterness on his lips—all this was to proclaim a moral and spiritual victory as complete as it is inspiring.

Now no man, however deep in the counsels of God, can win this conquest of self easily or without some assured intellectual and spiritual basis. And to follow out the line of thought taken in a previous Study, no mission can arrive at the place where it is prepared to accept and act unreservedly on this principle of self-abnegation without the greatest heart-searching and consecration. A thousand good reasons will be found to modify this principle of John the Baptist in its complete

and final application to the problems of Church and Mission. Therefore, before the individual or the Church or the Mission can adopt this self-decreasing and Christ-increasing programme of the Baptist, there must be a personal discovery of those abiding facts which make this attitude necessary, and which will enable us to maintain it.

Turn then to the experience of the Baptist. Can we discover those facts which were to him the working basis of his triumphant selflessness? If we look carefully at his answer as recorded in John 3 : 27-30, reaching its climax in verse 30, I think we can discover those mental and spiritual attitudes which enabled him to put into practice his high principle.

There was first of all his conviction of the *Divine origin of all spiritual gifts*. "No man can receive anything unless it be given him from above." The R.V. translates the words "receive anything" as "take anything unto himself." The gifts of heaven cannot be easily or forcibly appropriated. They are bestowed by the bounteous grace of an all-knowing God and Father, upon those who are ready to receive, able to be trusted, and willing to use. And in light of this conviction, John could view with equanimity and rejoicing the increase of Christ. As the star of his own popularity waned, he gloried in the new constellation which had appeared, and of which he was convinced there would be no waning. Had he reached his zenith at the Jordan? It was the gift of heaven. Had he now to work in a quieter and less spectacular way by the quiet springs of Aenon? It was the Divine purpose. Was the one One whom he had so

dramatically announced to claim the world's allegiance and to draw all men unto Himself?—Then He must be the Sent of God. Thus in quietness of spirit, and in entire absence of bitterness, was John able to contemplate the increasing popularity of Jesus.

How much envy and soul-hurt would we be saved if, as we stepped out on the way of life, we could adopt this attitude of John! By prayer and consultation to find out that particular gift which we have "received from above," and then to spend life in the mediation of that gift to others. Thus alone can we behold our own lot with contentment and peace. That vexation of spirit and that fret of soul, which are the inevitable result of viewing what *is* in the false light of what we think *might* have been, can never torment him who believes his gift, however humble it be, is from heaven. That unhealthy yearning to be great or famed or popular will find no place, for, to the man of John's mind, greatness was to be found only as the heaven-bestowed gift of whatever nature was used to the glory of the Giver. Thus can we behold with rejoicing the success and popularity of others. Not only is there no room for jealousy, for their gifts are of God, but those manifestations of the divine working must ever call forth our thankfulness and rejoicing. To believe firmly in the heavenly origin of life's high and worthy gifts is to tread without stumbling the way of peace.

Another fact which enabled John the Baptist to maintain this selfless attitude was that he realized

The Friend of the Bridegroom

clearly what must ever be the *relationship between Christ and the disciple*. Where was the place for envy when what was happening was the recognized fulfilment of the ministry of John? He was a "voice," to tell the wonder of the coming One. He was a "herald," to announce the appearing of the King. He was the "preparer of the way," for the feet of Him Who was the Prince of Peace. John's whole ministry can well be summed up in his proclamation by the waters of Jordan, "Behold, behold! The Lamb of God." And so, when weary men and women, in obedience to this call of John, beheld Christ, felt the attraction of His personality and the soul-healing of His touch and presence, and in obedience turned to follow, *then* the Baptist felt that his work was accomplished and "this his joy fulfilled."

It is in further illustration of this fact that John calls himself "the friend of the bridegroom." What was the friend's task? It was simply to arrange the details of the coming union. It was to plead with the bride the excellences of the bridegroom, and to prepare the bride for the meeting with her Lord. It was finally to bring both together in the act of uniting when both became for ever one. As the bridegroom's friend stood by his side in the moment of his gladness and heard his voice, the voice of acceptance and of avowal, only *then* did he know his work completed, and he could leave the bride and bridegroom to their new-found joy. The joy of the friend is that, not of the *united*, but of the *uniter* who sees his work finished and the union complete. Then may he pass from the

dramatically announced to claim the world's allegiance and to draw all men unto Himself?—Then He must be the Sent of God. Thus in quietness of spirit, and in entire absence of bitterness, was John able to contemplate the increasing popularity of Jesus.

How much envy and soul-hurt would we be saved if, as we stepped out on the way of life, we could adopt this attitude of John! By prayer and consultation to find out that particular gift which we have "received from above," and then to spend life in the mediation of that gift to others. Thus alone can we behold our own lot with contentment and peace. That vexation of spirit and that fret of soul, which are the inevitable result of viewing what *is* in the false light of what we think *might* have been, can never torment him who believes his gift, however humble it be, is from heaven. That unhealthy yearning to be great or famed or popular will find no place, for, to the man of John's mind, greatness was to be found only as the heaven-bestowed gift of whatever nature was used to the glory of the Giver. Thus can we behold with rejoicing the success and popularity of others. Not only is there no room for jealousy, for their gifts are of God, but those manifestations of the divine working must ever call forth our thankfulness and rejoicing. To believe firmly in the heavenly origin of life's high and worthy gifts is to tread without stumbling the way of peace.

Another fact which enabled John the Baptist to maintain this selfless attitude was that he realized

The Friend of the Bridegroom

clearly what must ever be the *relationship between Christ and the disciple*. Where was the place for envy when what was happening was the recognized fulfilment of the ministry of John? He was a "voice," to tell the wonder of the coming One. He was a "herald," to announce the appearing of the King. He was the "preparer of the way," for the feet of Him Who was the Prince of Peace. John's whole ministry can well be summed up in his proclamation by the waters of Jordan, "Behold, behold! The Lamb of God." And so, when weary men and women, in obedience to this call of John, beheld Christ, felt the attraction of His personality and the soul-healing of His touch and presence, and in obedience turned to follow, *then* the Baptist felt that his work was accomplished and "this his joy fulfilled."

It is in further illustration of this fact that John calls himself "the friend of the bridegroom." What was the friend's task? It was simply to arrange the details of the coming union. It was to plead with the bride the excellences of the bridegroom, and to prepare the bride for the meeting with her Lord. It was finally to bring both together in the act of uniting when both became for ever one. As the bridegroom's friend stood by his side in the moment of his gladness and heard his voice, the voice of acceptance and of avowal, only *then* did he know his work completed, and he could leave the bride and bridegroom to their new-found joy. The joy of the friend is that, not of the *united*, but of the *uniter* who sees his work finished and the union complete. Then may he pass from the

The Conquest of the Gloom

scene, glad with that gladness which comes from a task well done.

What deep spiritual insight was granted to this man of God! Did he foresee the Church, the Bride of the Lamb, called and prepared for the bridegroom by his ministry? Thus did he comfort himself as he laboured in quieter scenes by the waters of Aenon. He had heard the bridegroom's voice of acceptance. Then let him now step aside. Let him decrease and wane, for his task was accomplished and his joy fulfilled. This, I venture to suggest, must ever be the relation between the disciple and his Lord. Our work is to introduce the world to Christ and then to trust it to Him. We are witnesses to the beauties, the attractions and the excellences of our Saviour. Therefore, in doing this, we shall be careful not to draw attention to ourselves. We shall ever seek to disclose Him, to reveal Him, to tell of Him, to work for Him. Our joy shall be fulfilled as we behold men drawn to, and united with, Him in an everlasting allegiance. And further, this principle must surely hold with Christian societies as well as with individual followers of Jesus. Here is the supreme task of missions, not to build up large and expensive institutions or to perfect their organizations as such, but to bring into being the Church, the Bride of Christ. When, as the result of faithful service, the Bride has been presented to the Bridegroom; when the society or mission has heard the voice of acceptance and has seen something of the great uniting, then let the "friend" decrease and pass on to other tasks, his work in this place accomplished,

and his joy fulfilled, able to trust the Bride to the love of the Bridegroom.

In spite of the view of some scholars that verses 31-36 were not actually uttered by John the Baptist at this time, it seems to me that we can accept them as expressing a further basis of his renunciation. They reveal his conception of *the uniqueness and finality of Christ*. There was no place for envy in the heart of John, because that heart and mind were full of the supreme value of Him Whom he had announced, and Who was now gathering men into His Kingdom. Christ was unique in His origin (31-32), in His message (34), and in His mediatorial work (35-36). With such an estimate of the worth of Christ, any personal sacrifice which secured the uplifting of this unique and final Saviour, was not only his duty, but his joy.

Follower of Jesus—thou “Friend of the Bridegroom”—What a task is thine! Thou needst not fear that the best thou canst say of the Bridegroom will come short of what He really is. He is perfect in lineage—the Lord of Lords. He is unique in His message—“speaking the words of God” in love and truth. He holdeth the gift of life for all believers. Thy joy as His friend will be fulfilled when thou dost hear His voice of approval and acceptance, and when thou dost see that Church for which thou hast laboured, and which He has purchased with His own blood, become the spotless Bride of her risen Lord.



"The High Calling of Christ Jesus"

ON two of the most dramatic and unforgettable occasions in the lives of the disciples Jesus used the expression, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." The first occasion was in His last intercessory prayer, for ever written upon the heart of St. John. The other was on the occasion of the amazing appearing of the risen Christ, when the rather fearful and wholly bewildered band of disciples was gathered behind closed doors. Suddenly, in the silence, they were conscious of the presence of Him who had been their Master and was now their triumphant Lord, and without delay or introduction He made the simple but profound announcement, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

Deeply as these words must have impressed the disciples, there can be little doubt that their implication was not fully grasped. The crisis through which they had passed was so recent, and the events of the resurrection so astounding, that the disciples were at that time unable to apprise the full meaning of that quiet announcement. Indeed even to us, who consider it in the light of nineteen centuries of contemplation, does it seem full of an almost unfathomable meaning. Can it be true that Jesus, standing in the authority of His resurrection power, says to them and to us, "My calling is your calling,

The High Calling of Christ Jesus

and my task is your task?" Let us look at the implications of this high call.

There is an *Identity of Purpose* here. We can read Christ's call thus: "I send you to fulfil that high purpose for which the Father sent me." But what was that purpose? It has been described by Jesus Himself in unforgettable words: "The Son of Man is come to seek and save that which is lost" (Luke 19: 10). For this was the deepest meaning of the incarnation, the climax of a perfect life, the value of the atoning death. True it is that the Son was and is the supreme revelation of the Father, that His teaching reached the highest moral and spiritual level, and that as He moved from place to place disease and death fled at His approach. Yet these phases of His work—fraught with untold blessing for mankind as they were, and the inevitable results of the divine being made flesh—these in themselves were not the main purpose which He deliberately set as the highest achievement of His coming. They were attendant blessings that followed as He pressed on to the goal of His high calling. That goal was the Cross with all the redemptive energies it was to release upon a lost world. In His own words, "He came to seek and save that which was lost." He was "straitened" till this purpose was accomplished. It was from that Cross of perfect self-emptying that He could claim a task completed and a world redeemed, and cry aloud, "It is finished."

It follows, then, if our interpretation be correct, that there is for the followers of Jesus an identity of purpose. We too are to seek and save the lost,

yet not by the sacrifice of a Cross, but by the gift of service that may well be the pouring out of life. Amid all the varied tasks which have been wrongly classed as secular and religious, we must ever test ourselves by applying this implication—are we seeking and saving that which is lost from the way of goodness and the way to God through Christ?

Bear with me further. The division of Missionary activity into medical, evangelistic, educational, industrial; the strenuous efforts being made towards specialisation within these departments and the raising of the standard of efficiency with the consequent strain on the time and strength of supervisors and staffs; the element of competition with other similar non-missionary establishments—all these factors, necessary and advisable though they may be, make it doubly incumbent on us that we examine ourselves and our work with relation to the supreme purpose of Christ for His followers. To heal a broken or tortured body; to educate a mind or train a mechanic is undoubtedly a Christ-like task, but the peril lies here that we can do all these things and never "Seek the lost" in the way that Jesus meant. Definite evangelistic effort in institutional work is in danger of being crowded out by the multiplicity of other claims.

What of the Church in India, the Body of Christ, dedicated to the fulfilment of the redeeming purposes of its head? With persistence, with self-denial, with courage is she seeking and saving the lost? Is there not an ever-present peril that amid the labyrinth of her organisation, pastor and people alike may lose their way, and dissipate those

resources of money and time that should primarily be dedicated to the fulfilment of that high purpose for which Christ purchased the Church with His own blood. That accession of spiritual power, those longed-for days of refreshing from on high will come to the Church in India not primarily through wider union or more perfect organisation or even through self-support, but as she gives herself with all her mind and soul to the fulfilment of that high calling in Christ Jesus, the seeking and saving of the lost.

I see in Christ's announcement an *Identity of Enabling* provided for the disciple. It is highly significant that the words of the risen Lord as recorded by St. John, are immediately followed by the exhortation, "Receive ye, take ye the Holy Ghost." Viewed in the light of Christ's final injunction to wait for power from on high, and in the light of all the enabling power released at Pentecost, we cannot but be sure that Jesus meant, "As the Father sent me and baptised me with the Holy Spirit, so I send and baptise you."

This surely was wholly reasonable, for the task of seeking and saving the lost was far beyond those dispirited and bewildered men. That high call was not in itself their enabling, but it was surely proof that He who set before them such a task would share with them that equipment of power by which He Himself had accomplished His work. That Jordan experience, when the Holy Spirit as a gentle dove abode upon Him with a baptism mightier than that of John, must ever have been vividly before Him, and He longed that those to whom He was entrusting the establishment of His

Kingdom, might enter into a personal experience of the mighty energies of the Holy Ghost. Jesus realised to the full the forces of evil at work in the world, and He had experienced in His own body on the tree all the malignant powers of darkness. He knew, as none of His followers can ever know, the cost of seeking and saving the lost. He who was baptised at the commencement of His ministry ; He who wrought wonders through the Holy Ghost and finally "Through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God" ; He realised to the full the aids, the keeping and the enabling powers of the Spirit of God.

And all this enabling is for us. In all this amplitude of enduement we can and must share. What though the disciples had listened for three years to such teaching as never could have come from mortal lips ! What though they had a wondrous message for the souls of men in the death of Calvary, and the glad certainty of the resurrection morning ! None of these things was sufficient for this task of seeking and saving the lost. Only the experience of Pentecost with its deep, abiding, and perpetual inward ministry could avail for this high calling.

There is also in that expression of Jesus a suggestion of *Identity of Reward*. He prayed that His followers might see the glory of the Only-begotten, and He told them that He went before in order that they might later be where He was. And there is, in more than one of the parables, a clear indication that faithful service brings its eternal reward. When we are sent to seek and to save the lost it is as the servants of no ordinary Master. There were

The High Calling of Christ Jesus

joys as well as pains which He knew we could never share nor understand. But the joys of seeking and the ecstasies of winning are experiences which He longs for us to share. That high and holy reward—perfect acceptance with the Father because of a perfect compliance to His holy purpose—that reward we too can surely know.

As the light of dawn crept up the hills about the Lake of Galilee a fishing boat neared the shore, full of disappointed and weary fishermen. They saw in the uncertain light a figure upon the shore, and heard a quiet call over the water, "Children, have ye any meat?" and then again, "Cast the net on the right side." Sacred memories awoke at the sound of that loved voice, and darkness and despair fled forever away. The full radiance of a perfect joy and certainty dawned upon their hearts and lighted them for ever. So, bringing of the fishes they had taken at the command of their risen Lord, they dined together, sharing the rewards of that Christ-directed endeavour.

Is there not here a glad encouragement for those who in fear and weakness follow the high calling of seeking and saving the lost? Some day our Lord will call us to a feast in those mansions He has gone to prepare, but the viands will be of our garnering and preparing. "Fishers of men" and "Seekers of the lost" will then find that because they sought to fulfil their high calling in Christ Jesus and identify themselves with the redemptive purposes of their Lord, He shares with them in the heavenly places His joy and Crown.



The Cure of Care

THE Psalmist was in sore spiritual trouble. He had come to realise that a dangerous malady had visited his soul, all the more dangerous in that it was so insidious. There is every reason to believe that this is a Psalm of David (Psalm 37) and as was his wont, he dealt with his perplexities as something to be faced in communion with God. David had found that to ponder his problem, and to expose his soul in the Divine presence was the speediest way to reach peace.

Thus he reveals in this Psalm an insidious peril of spirit to which he felt himself open. It was what he described as a condition of "Fretting." Three times in the first nine verses does he address his soul, "Fret not." The mysterious prosperity of the wicked; the bitter hostilities of Saul, Nabal and Absalom; the responsibilities and cares of his high estate—all these were combined to create a situation in which his soul was fretful, burdened, peaceless.

But "fretting" is surely a harmless sickness of the soul? Not so. For it carries the meaning of "to heat one's self in anger." It has its roots in "friction" or that contact which is productive of heat. The most powerful mechanism, or the most delicately adjusted machine can be rendered useless by friction. Let some foreign body enter, or let

the arrangements for the lubrication of the moving parts be imperfect, and "fret," "friction," heat, and finally destruction will result.

To the keenly spiritual sense of the Psalmist such a malady as that must not be allowed to lay its grip on his soul. He recognised its danger, and he realised its results. He knew full well that the fret of care and the restlessness of anxiety were incompatible with that experience of God which is the birthright of every soul. He set himself resolutely to counteract this danger and to cure his care.

To the follower of Jesus there is even a higher obligation and a more perfect cure. The calls of the day ; the burden of those high responsibilities which God has laid upon all who follow in truth ; the perplexities attendant on the varied experience of life ; the trials of faith and the seeming prosperity of evil—all these factors, with many others, tend to introduce the element of "fret" into the soul's experience. We get so used to the presence of this that we do not realise its danger. Petty "frettings" lead to larger "frictions." The heat of misunderstanding is generated. The surfaces of life's contacts become marred. Friendships wane. Co-operation in work becomes difficult and feelings and prejudices, which are absolutely incompatible with a living sense of God, lay a paralysing grip upon the soul. Spiritual growth is impossible, and we lose the sense of the presence of Jesus. His parting gift of peace—that which can be experienced *in* the world just because it is not *of* the world—we do not know, for there is turmoil in our soul.

The Conquest of the Gloom

Now David found a cure for all this in a four-fold *Relation to God*. He realised instinctively what it takes us so long to realise, namely, that peace of heart is dependent, not on the absence of irksome duties or burdening responsibilities, but on the contact of the soul with God *in the midst* of those very conditions seemingly so antagonistic to peace. It was, therefore, to the securing and to the deepening of this relationship with God that the Psalmist set himself in the certainty that here and here only was the cure for his heated and fretful spirit. So he addresses his soul in a fourfold injunction in the first seven verses, and finds the cure for care in a relationship to God which he defines as "Trust" (v. 3), "Delight" (v. 4), "Committal" (v. 5), and "Rest" (v. 7).

"Trust in the Lord and do good" or, as a marginal reading in the R.V. gives, "feed on faithfulness." Thus the Psalmist counselled his soul. Amid all the cares, the bewildering and seeming inconsistencies and frets of life, the soul is to be preserved at peace by an attitude of trust in God, and by "feeding on His faithfulness." This is a strange expression, but one full of suggestion. The faithfulness, the unchanging moral perfections of the Godhead and His everlasting and trustworthy promises are to be the food of the soul by which it shall be nourished. The object of this trust is not to be circumstance, or human aid, but must be the Lord Himself in the eternal goodness and justice and love of his being. This, and this alone, is the sheet anchor for faith. We cannot understand the existence of pain and evil; they

The Cure of Care

fret our spirits. We wonder at the mysterious dispensations of God ; they cause our faith to stagger. We cry aloud at the seeming injustices of life. But there is a refuge above all, a place that David found and a sustenance for the soul of which he partook—the faithfulness of God, the absolute truthworthiness of Jehovah.

Again the Psalmist enjoins his soul, “Delight thyself in the Lord.” This is surely the active aspect of trust. If “trust in the Lord” is to cast oneself, with all one’s doubts and frettings, upon the sure refuge of the unchanging faithfulness and dependableness of God, then “to delight in the Lord” is to realise in the experience of His presence and in the glad assurance of His nearness, those high and holy joys which shall banish the anxieties and cares of life in so far as they tend to fret the soul.

Here again see the high spiritual level to which the Psalmist raises the whole question of the cure of care. In other words, he says to his soul, and to us of this modern day. “Be more occupied with your Lord than with your difficulties. Minimise your problems and magnify your resources. Take time to be absorbed in your God—His faithfulness, His holy will, His high purpose for you and the world.” And St. Paul echoes this in his repeated injunction to the Philippian church : “Rejoice in the Lord, and again I will say, Rejoice.” The manifold complications of modern life and service, its problems and oppositions and cares are such as to overwhelm the soul unless just this attitude is practised. Take time to find delight in

the Lord. Take time to rejoice in the Lord. Take time to magnify and exult in His resources made available for human need.

Further the writer says, "Commit thy way unto the Lord," and the same is translated in the margin and in Proverbs 16 : 3 as, "Roll thy works upon the Lord." The Psalmist refused to allow his burdens to rest upon him in such a way as would rob him of the joy of the Lord. Note the significance of the word "Roll." It seems to me to hold a deeper meaning than "commit" or "cast." We "roll" those objects or burdens which are *too heavy to lift*, and I like to draw comfort from this. Those mountainous problems in our work before which we stand dismayed ; those perplexities past all human comprehension ; those mundane duties so common that they crush—all I cannot "lift," I can "roll." He who is omnipotent, whose faithfulness is as a great deep, and whose goodness and love are from everlasting to everlasting, *His* it is to deal with those situations before which we stand helpless and afraid. Let us refuse in humble determination to attempt to match our weakness against impossible tasks which will lead to despair and fretting, but let us take the way of the Psalmist and "Roll our works upon the Lord."

And the final injunction is, "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him." The marginal reading is "Be silent unto Jehovah and wait for Him (His time)." David may have had in mind his experience with Nabal as recorded in 1 Sam. 25 : 39. Whatever was the immediate cause of his unrest of spirit, he felt it to be disastrous to the highest inter-

ests of his being. This impatience had to cease and this friction must pass away. So he reminded himself of his real resting place in God. He could not rest in anything about him. Friends were false. The wicked went on their way of seeming prosperity. Possibly some of his most cherished plans were unfulfilled when they seemed to him so necessary to the situation. All without was unrest and something of that turmoil had found a lodging in the recesses of his soul.

So from the unrest about him and within he turned to God. And this too for us is the only place of rest from the fretful cares of life. Wait God's time. There are high purposes to be accomplished which haste can mar. There are deep disciplines of soul which to escape were direst loss. There is a "time" with our Lord, a time of perfect fulfilment, a time of answered prayer, a time of satisfied hopes. "Be silent unto Jehovah."



The Deprivation of Prayerlessness

IN the parable of the three friends (Luke 11 : 5-8) Jesus makes very clear the threefold implication of prayer. He speaks of the friend who was benighted as he journeyed ; of the friend to whose door he came knocking at midnight ; and of the third friend who was roused from his sleep to provide for the needy. In other words, there was the friend the source of supply ; the friend the medium of supply, and the friend the object of supply.

Thus in all real prayer there is this threefold implication and three personalities are influenced. There is God, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, the one inexhaustible source of all real enrichment. There is the intercessor, the one who prays and whose life is the medium of blessing. And there is the object of prayer, the friend of the midnight hour, who has travelled far, and who craves those enrichments that the man of prayer can supply.

Now the deprivation of prayerlessness and its essential sin lie in the fact that in the prayerless life there is a threefold limitation and impoverishment. God, the source of all, is deprived of the means of bestowing Himself and His gifts. The life that should be the medium of blessing to others, by lack of prayer, has unfitted itself for this task, and the needy souls of the world, who knock at our doors

The Deprivation of Prayerlessness

at midnight, and who might have been the recipients of the enrichments of God, are left to faint and fall by the way. Think of these more fully.

Prayerlessness means the *Deprivation of God*. Nor does such a fact conflict with His omnipotence. Cannot God work independently of human agency, and of His own pure and beneficent will give those blessings which His omniscience sees are needful for mankind? Most assuredly He can. Yet in every realm of thought and life, the Divine Method has been to work through human personality. Those wonderful gifts to the world in the realm of creative art—the music that purges the spirit, the pictures that speak of all lovely and holy things, the books that are the friends of mankind—all these are bestowed, not independently of, but mediated through, human personality and gifts. So with the greatest discoveries of science. They have not been superimposed upon mankind by an omnipotent God, but have been the results of human patience and skill controlled by Him Whose are all the powers of nature. And in history the same principle holds true that God uses human personality to accomplish His greatest deliverances and bestow His choicest blessings.

Especially is this principle valid in the realm of religious life. If we trace the genesis of any or all of the great religious movements which have redeemed mankind, revived his fainting faith, and given him a new vision of the Divine, we shall in every case discover that the movement was born in the soul of some individual, and that God used this consecrated and revived soul as a means and a

channel through which He could release Himself upon the world. Further still is this true of the individual experience of God, and most of us have to acknowledge with gratitude that the dawn of spiritual experience came through the ministry of some human personality full of God. Highest of all, in obedience to this self-imposed law, God was mediated in the person of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and was in Him, reconciling the world unto Himself.

The life of prayer is, in its ultimate meaning, just this—the placing of ourselves in that attitude to God in which He can use us as media for the bestowal of Himself in all His varied manifestations for the blessing of mankind. And the solemn truth is that prayerlessness means the removal of the human personality, that God-ordained means by which He enriches mankind. By that self-imposed law, by which God does not superimpose His gifts upon an unwilling world, but waits for yielded and prayerful lives, God is limited, imprisoned and circumscribed in His working by our carelessness and forgetfulness. How true are the words of the prophet in their tragic wistfulness: “The Lord wondered that there was no intercessor.” Wondered that in face of man’s need and His abundance there could be found no prayerful life through which He might bestow Himself. Some of the most severe words of condemnation in the New Testament were couched in the words, “Ye have limited the Holy One of Israel.” Here lies the high-reaching sin of the prayerless life. It is the deprivation of the Divine, and the rendering impotent of

The Deprivation of Prayerlessness

omnipotence. It is the erection of a barrier around Him Who is the source of all good, and a damming back of those rivers of water of life that flow from out of the throne of God.

But prayerlessness means also the *Deprivation of the one who should have prayed*. I have a friend who was taken with a dread sickness. His medical adviser after examining him gave his verdict, and told him that his one hope of life was to live in the open, to breathe continually the life-giving winds of heaven, and to spend his days in the sunlight. What would have been said had my friend sought out the darkest and most ill-ventilated house he could find, and there spent his days in sunless seclusion? Had death overtaken him in his disobedience and folly, would not the verdict have been—he took his life, for he refused to use those great provisions of nature for restoration and health. Thus prayerlessness is spiritual suicide. To pray is to breathe the pure and life-bestowing atmosphere of heaven and to dwell in the healing presence of the Sun of Righteousness. To refrain from prayer or to crowd it out, is to deprive the soul of that which is its highest life.

In this land of irrigation we see how the life-giving waters of the great rivers are conveyed to those dry and thirsty tracts where useless desert is made to blossom like the rose. But I have noticed that in the fiercest heat of summer the banks of those canals and smaller viaducts are verdant green, and sometimes delicate flowers bloom. Yet those canals are neither the *source* of the supply, nor the *object* nor the *destination* of the supply. They are

only the media through which the life-bestowing streams are conveyed to the place of need. Yet what happens? The water cannot pass through the channel without enriching it and causing a freshness and beauty that are a joy to behold.

Even thus it is with the life of prayer. We cannot intercede without ourselves being enriched by those streams of blessing which we direct to another's need, and the grievous deprivation of prayerlessness lies in this—that in withholding our lives as channels we not only limit God in His bestowal, but we, whose mediating personalities might be fragrant and verdant with the passing on of the divine enrichments, are barren and unlovely.

There is in addition the truth that prayerlessness means the *Deprivation of the Needy*. The friend who had set off on a visit commenced his journey so jauntily. He had not seen his friend for years. But as the day wore on and his destination was still far off, he began to be weary. His little store of food was quite exhausted by nightfall, yet he plodded on. Any moment now he might see his friend's hospitable roof, and all his need would most surely be met. There he would be fed and rested. Alas, in the gathering dusk he went astray and it was nearly midnight before a fainting and footsore traveller knocked loudly at the closed door of the darkened house.

What consternation within! A midnight visitor! but the door was opened and the weary friend half-carried, half-led to the warmth within. Then the awful truth dawned upon the host—there was

nothing to give him! Again he searched the house; no, nothing; and the visitor fainted with hunger. Then he bethought him of his other wealthy friend, who that very day had made a great baking of loaves. He slipped out of the house, ran to his neighbour's door and commenced to knock. There was silence within. Again he knocked and louder. Yet again, till the street echoed with his importunity. "Friend, give me three loaves!" he cried, "I have a friend in the greatest need. I beseech thee, give!" No excuse would he take from his churlish neighbour, for he remembered his fainting friend and his own bare cupboard. He carried away "as many as he needed."

How often weary, doubting, seeking men and women have knocked at our door at midnight. They expected to find satisfaction and encouragement and the way to God, and, alas—we had nothing to give them! Our spiritual stock was nil; our cupboards bare. We were out of touch with divine resources. Then must we turn them away hungry, footsore and disappointed, to continue their weary search at some more promising home? Not so. There is another Friend just at hand who has abundance—"as many as thou needest." Seek His door, even at midnight. He "neither slumbers nor sleeps." He is "more willing to give than thou art to receive." His resources are ever at the disposal of the man of prayer. "Ask and thou shalt receive," then take with gladness to thy needy friend. It is the bread of Heaven, and none need turn in disappointment from the door.

The Conquest of the Gloom

This were tragedy and deprivation indeed if thou didst forget thy mighty Friend, and the midnight seeker turned back into the cold and the darkness.



“His Resurrection Power”

THE empty tomb and the resurrection morning transformed all things for the followers of Jesus. The men who furtively from among the scoffing throng around the Cross, watched the dying of their Lord, found that in His resurrection there was all power. So it was for the Apostle Paul. He discovered that it made his gospel reasonable, believable, joyful and worth propagating.

Wherein then lay the power, the “dynamic” of the resurrection? There was first of all the *power of perfect certitude*. Every conceivable form of doubt which up to, and after the death of Jesus, had persistently assailed the disciples, was by the fact of the resurrection for ever dissipated. They entered a new realm of glorious and triumphant certainty. Their every thought of Jesus, their every relationship with Him, was now raised from the sphere of speculation into that of conviction. The three years of companionship was now thought of as spent with that One who was stronger than death. His teaching had a new authority, for it was the pronouncement of one who had now proved himself to be divine. The shame and suffering and ignominy of the cross, which had brought them all into the darkness of doubt, they could now understand and glory in. The Lord was risen, and power came with certitude.

Thus shall it ever be with the follower of Jesus. The world does not wish to hear our doubts, for it has its own. True it is that there is a place for reverent speculation, and some great souls have had great doubts, for the highest thought can lose itself in these depths and heights and lengths and breadths which bound the secrets of the Lord. Yet that which clothed the disciples with power was their new certainty about *Jesus*, their risen Lord and Master. They had no doubts about *Him*—His divine nature and redeeming worth. There were many things they did not know, many implications of their message of which they had not yet dreamed, but of that luminous and transforming fact that their crucified Lord was risen and divine—of that they had no shadow of doubt. And because of this certainty about Him who was the centre and the circumference of their message, they were men of might who called the world to the feet of Jesus.

Some one has said, "Doubt your doubts, but believe your beliefs." There can be no power in dubiety about Him Who is our all. Much there will always be, thank God, that we cannot understand, and which will continue to call forth the reverent inquiry of consecrated minds. But we shall never be disciples of power unless we are disciples with certainty. A certainty as to Christ's divine nature, a certainty as to His divine work and its atoning efficacy. The problems we have to confront are too overwhelming; the opposition around too implacable; the power of evil entrenched in the hearts of men too deep and uni-

versal for us to proclaim less than glad facts of assured certainty.

Then surely there was what might be called the *power of a new understanding*. Towards the end of the three short years of fellowship with Jesus, these men had come to know that there lay before their Master some dark and awful experience. He spoke to them often about it and called it His death. Can we wonder that these men found it hard to believe that the One who was stronger than sickness and mightier than death should ever succumb to that power which He had conquered in others? In their own words, "That were far from Thee."

Yet He died. The wondrous teacher, the loving friend, the mighty healer, the reviver of the dead—*this* One was nailed like a criminal to a wooden cross of shame, and they had to watch Him die. It was all so inglorious and purposeless and disappointing.

And then the resurrection morning dawned. The sealed tomb delivered up the Lord, and was habited by angelic messengers whose words were the very music of heaven in the ears of those doubt-tormented men. Thus the radiant light of a glad truth dawned upon their souls that if He had risen, and thus was stronger than the death He had yielded to, that death of the Cross was no climax of defeat, no inevitable submission to a stronger power, but a voluntary act of yielding, an expression of love so perfect that it could withhold nothing, a supreme effort to bring the world to God.

With this new understanding of the meaning of

The Conquest of the Gloom

His death, there was born in the disciples' hearts a boundless love and devotion. Their Lord's life had been so beautiful, His death so laden with atoning worth, His rising so triumphant that for ever they were His to obey and to serve.

Another element in the power of the resurrection was the *call to a world-wide task*. How fervent had been their protestations to Jesus of undying faithfulness and loyal service, and how complete had been their pitiful desertion of Him, in the hour of His greatest need. That must have been in the days immediately following His death, a most poignant and grievous memory. They had failed the kindest friend they had ever known, and no more could they trust themselves.

But the resurrection brought to them a call from the risen Christ, a call to personal dedication for the task of proclaiming those truths which they had heard from Christ and seen in Him. Dark despair at their own failure and uselessness gave place to a holy joy and gratitude that the risen Lord still trusted them and would use them. Though in the light of His resurrection, their desertion of Him seemed all the more blameworthy and grievous, a new peace and power flooded their hearts as they heard that call and realised its significance.

The challenge that comes from a call to a high task is always power. However conscious we may be of personal unfitness or of past unfaithfulness, the God-given tasks of life are all echoes of that call of Christ which was part of the power of the resurrection. Let us look on them as such—not

as crushing burdens of responsibility to be borne with an inward protest. They are proofs that our Lord still trusts us, sees in us possibilities of service, and pledges Himself as our equipment.

And that suggests that the power of the resurrection lay supremely in the *Baptism which followed it*. Certainty, a new devotion, a high call—all these were bestowed by the resurrection. But more than that was required, and for that they had to tarry. There had to be a baptism which would seal their certainty, enrich their understanding, and give them power for that call to service. Because their Master had risen, and because He now spoke to them with a new authority, they were ready to obey, and ten days of waiting and self-examination and prayer prepared them for the supreme gift of resurrection power. For the winning of a world Jesus knew that the all-important gift was to receive power from on high in the person of the Holy Ghost and His abiding. Assurance may falter; early enthusiasms of devotion may wane; the call to service may lose its first-born joy in later grave responsibilities. But that abiding Spirit was to be the gift of power equal to the high task, and ever available.

For Saint Paul there was one great aim—the experimental knowledge of this resurrection power. It was to him the highest reach of Christian experience, for by it he found that Christ's sufferings and death became intelligible and full of meaning. He longed with a deep and passionate desire that resurrection certainty and love and service and baptism might be the daily experience of his soul.

It was for this he "counted all things but loss."
It was for this he "pressed on towards the mark."

The resurrection is a fact of history. It can and should be a fact of experience. Is there any greater need in the church universal to-day? Do we not need just these factors to make the Church aflame—the power of assurance and love and service and the Holy Ghost? But this will come to the church only through the experience of the individual. Therefore let us, at this resurrection season, anew "counting all things but loss," with humility and prayer seek to enter into "the power of his resurrection."



XIV

"Keep Yourselves in the Love of God."

THE Epistle of Jude was written to meet a serious situation that had arisen in the church or churches to which it was addressed. A most grievous and insidious form of false teaching had appeared, which confused Christian liberty with licence to do evil—and such evil as was gross sin. Hence the burden of the Epistle is a denunciation of such false teachers and their teaching, and an earnest plea that the readers "contend for the Faith." In the latter part of the letter the note of denunciation gives place to that of exhortation, and the Christian is presented with a cure for the evils of false doctrine in the injunction, "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (verse 21).

What is the meaning of this injunction? Can it mean that the love of God is limited? Does it indicate that there are spheres of life in which the love of God is not operative? The word used in the original might be more fully translated as, "Take care of yourselves by keeping yourselves in the love of God," and it was the writer's desire that his readers should ever preserve a vital sense of God's love, a daily experience of His gracious and beneficent presence. God's love is not circum-

scribed or local, nor is there any sphere in life or experience in which that love cannot be operative, but it is sadly true that, by doubt, sin, and unfaithfulness, we can miss the deep and rich personal experience of that all-pervading love. Fragrant as the breath of flowers; glorious as the lights of dawn; abundant as the air we breathe—such is the love of God. Yet the call of the writer is to a personal experience of what is universal, a keeping of ourselves in that place and attitude of life in which that love can be a bright and living reality.

But notice that we are told to "keep ourselves" in that love. Yet the tenor of New Testament teaching and evangelical Christianity is that we cannot keep ourselves, that the grace of God alone is sufficient, and that "He is able to keep that which I commit." And this is most certainly true to the spirit of the Gospel and to Christian experience. But there is a real sense in which we must "keep ourselves" in that attitude in which the love of God, with all that is connoted by that great expression, can be a real fact of personal experience. For instance, the beauty of nature is all around us in tree and flower and fleeting, sun-kissed cloud, but it is possible so to be absorbed in other things that we are out of touch with all this loveliness. We have to "keep ourselves" in that attitude where appreciation of nature is a fact of experience. So with the beauties of literature or art—in a very real sense we must keep ourselves. Even so with the greatest of all facts in the universe, the love of God. We have to preserve our contact with God. We have to refresh our knowledge of that love as

Keep Yourselves in the Love of God

revealed in Jesus Christ and His life and death. We have to maintain those attitudes which will bring to us the realisation that while God loves the world, God loves *me*.

I am glad the writer did not think it sufficient to advise his readers to "keep themselves in the love of God," but he gave several suggestions by which this could be achieved. For when we come to think of this injunction, we see it really holds the whole secret of Christian living, and is an exceeding high and lofty conception of the Christian life and experience. How then was this to be attained?

1. By the *ground-work of Faith*, for he says, "Building on your most holy faith." And is this not wholly in keeping with the teaching of St. Paul who holds before us the ideals of the Christian life as "faith, hope, love"? The climax or pinnacle is love—love for God and man, but the foundation is faith in God and man. Nor is this astonishing, for there can be no love without trust and faith. It is at times difficult, nay well nigh impossible to our finite gaze, for us to see love in God's dealings with us and with others. But because we cannot see and realise that love at first sight, it were folly to cast faith away. For that faith and trust which is content to believe where it cannot see is the very means by which, in due time, the perfection of that love will dawn upon our spirits. By faith, therefore, we are kept in the love of God.

2. "*Praying in the Holy Ghost*, keep yourselves in the love of God." The word used for prayer is that which emphasises prayer as worship and

communion more than as petition and intercession. And is there not the danger of our looking on prayer too much as simply the means of getting things from God? When we are in doubt, sorrow, peril, or need, how readily we flee to the place of prayer with our eager and earnest petitions for the divine gift and blessing. But how seldom we retire to the secret place simply to commune and worship, to realise anew His love and grace, to pour out our hearts to Him in adoration and gratitude, and to let the tides of His love sweep over our souls!

Thrice did the Master of Life, with blood-stained face and passionate earnestness, plead for the removal of the cup. His prayer as a *petition* was unanswered, but as *communion* it was blessed, for in that hour of worship and suffering, He realised anew that love of the Father that was sufficient even for a Cross. So it was throughout His life on earth—Jesus had to withdraw to the solitude of the mountain-side and to the gloom of the garden to “keep Himself in the love of God.”

3. Then the *attitude of expectation* was to help to keep them in the love of God. “Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” There can be no doubt that this refers to the belief of the Church in the return of the Lord. None can read the apostolic writings without being profoundly impressed with the place that the second coming of Christ held in the thought of the early church. It was one of the most potent influences which made for the sanctification life, and the early Christian Society. It was the appeal for holiness as

well as the basis of beneficence. This also holds true when we turn to Christian biography and the experience of the ages. It is most remarkable to note that a very large number of the men who have left the deepest impress on the religious life and thought of the world, have been men to whom the thought of the reappearing of our Lord has meant much. There may be differing views as to the manner and time of that coming. Indeed, had these facts been essential to Christian faith, Jesus would surely have revealed them. But there can be no doubt or ambiguity about the Master's teaching that He is coming; that He is coming suddenly, and that His coming will be a time of blessing and of judgment.

Nor can we hope to "keep ourselves in the love of God" and in the daily experience of His presence if we neglect or belittle this element of expectation in the Christian faith. "We are saved by hope," and we help to keep ourselves by "the hope of His coming."

4. Then there is *service*, for the writer devotes the next two verses to the need of serving and saving others. He seems to indicate that this effort to save will help to "keep us in the love of God." And surely this is so. The love of God has its supreme revelation not in the work of creation, not even in the teaching of Jesus, but in the Cross of Calvary where love became sacrificial and redemptive. So we cannot hope to know the reality of that love unless it works in us that redemptive passion, that earnest striving to bring souls to a knowledge of the love that sought us and died for

The Conquest of the Gloom

communion more than as petition and intercession. And is there not the danger of our looking on prayer too much as simply the means of getting things from God? When we are in doubt, sorrow, peril, or need, how readily we flee to the place of prayer with our eager and earnest petitions for the divine gift and blessing. But how seldom we retire to the secret place simply to commune and worship, to realise anew His love and grace, to pour out our hearts to Him in adoration and gratitude, and to let the tides of His love sweep over our souls!

Thrice did the Master of Life, with blood-stained face and passionate earnestness, plead for the removal of the cup. His prayer as a *petition* was unanswered, but as *communion* it was blessed, for in that hour of worship and suffering, He realised anew that love of the Father that was sufficient even for a Cross. So it was throughout His life on earth—Jesus had to withdraw to the solitude of the mountain-side and to the gloom of the garden to “keep Himself in the love of God.”

3. Then the *attitude of expectation* was to help to keep them in the love of God. “Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” There can be no doubt that this refers to the belief of the Church in the return of the Lord. None can read the apostolic writings without being profoundly impressed with the place that the second coming of Christ held in the thought of the early church. It was one of the most potent influences which made for the sanctification life, and the early Christian Society. It was the appeal for holiness as

Keep Yourselves in the Love of God

well as the basis of beneficence. This also holds true when we turn to Christian biography and the experience of the ages. It is most remarkable to note that a very large number of the men who have left the deepest impress on the religious life and thought of the world, have been men to whom the thought of the reappearing of our Lord has meant much. There may be differing views as to the manner and time of that coming. Indeed, had these facts been essential to Christian faith, Jesus would surely have revealed them. But there can be no doubt or ambiguity about the Master's teaching that He is coming; that He is coming suddenly, and that His coming will be a time of blessing and of judgment.

Nor can we hope to "keep ourselves in the love of God" and in the daily experience of His presence if we neglect or belittle this element of expectation in the Christian faith. "We are saved by hope," and we help to keep ourselves by "the hope of His coming."

4. Then there is *service*, for the writer devotes the next two verses to the need of serving and saving others. He seems to indicate that this effort to save will help to "keep us in the love of God." And surely this is so. The love of God has its supreme revelation not in the work of creation, not even in the teaching of Jesus, but in the Cross of Calvary where love became sacrificial and redemptive. So we cannot hope to know the reality of that love unless it works in us that redemptive passion, that earnest striving to bring souls to a knowledge of the love that sought us and died for

The Conquest of the Gloom

us. "He that winneth souls is wise," said the writer of old with an inspired wisdom, and truly this is so, for only as we are definitely seeking and saving the lost can we know the purpose of His love or "keep ourselves in the love of God."



The Sin of Prayerlessness

THE people of Israel had arrived at a grave national crisis (1 Sam. 12). So far they had been more or less content with a theocracy in which God ruled His people directly by means of chosen individuals—Moses, Joshua, the Judges, and the prophets. These were looked upon as the representatives of God, to whom was revealed His will and through whom His voice spoke. These were not the source of authority, but the media by which the divine mind and purpose and care were brought to bear on the national need. The struggle for existence in the midst of hostile nations, and the task of consolidating the Jewish nation had tended to produce a sense of complete dependence on God's personal care and guidance, and so for all these years the theocracy remained intact.

But a change had gradually come over the mind of the people of Israel. The more conservative element, who had seen the need of, and therefore cherished, the old régime, were passing away, and the younger generation was becoming somewhat impatient of the *status quo*. Outside influences were more and more being brought to bear on Israel's national problems. The rigid ban on everything Gentile and extraneous to the accepted customs was beginning to be regarded by the rising and progressive element as irksome, and the climax of the

The Conquest of the Gloom

popular feeling came with the definite request that "like all the nations" Israel might have a visible head, a king of her own around whom there might arise the pomp, power, and dignity which was associated with a throne, and which was to be seen in the surrounding nations. The change from theocracy to monarchy was very necessary for three reasons, said the progressive party. It was necessary for the effective administration of justice, for the upholding of authority, and for leadership in military enterprise (1 Sam. 8 : 20).

To the aged Samuel these demands came as a sudden and unexpected blow. He had "judged Israel all the days of his life." He had wept with them in their days of adversity, brooded over them in love, stood before the Lord as their representative and mediated to them the Divine will. So this seemed a personal blow at his prestige and influence—a sign that the nation was not prepared to accept longer his gentle rule, a quite heartless and unveiled attempt to remove the one who had for so long held the place of authority. We are told that Samuel was deeply grieved and, with the deep sense of displeasure upon him, sought the refuge of prayer. Wise in the wisdom of God, he knew the place to find healing for his disturbed and grieved spirit. Not in fruitless and undignified recrimination would he find relief, but in the act of prayer unto the Lord whom he had sought to serve with all his mind and soul. Here alone will resentment die, and the petty grievances of life fade into utter insignificance.

Yet the keen spiritual perception of the prophet

The Sin of Prayerlessness

sensed the grave national danger in the demand for a king, for it was not merely a blow at his personal authority. Far deeper was the danger that lay at the heart of the request for a visible monarch in whom the desire for pomp and display might find full expression. Samuel realised that there was a national heart-revolt against the rule of God—a dissatisfaction with the régime it had pleased God to inaugurate and to maintain. The whole movement was indicative of a growing estrangement from God and His direct control in the nation's affairs, and in *this*, said Samuel, lay the grave peril to the life of God's people (1 Sam. 8 : 7). It claimed to be a progressive movement for the uplift and the betterment of the nation. It claimed that times had changed, and the old simplicities which had sufficed for a past generation were insufficient for modern needs. It was insistent upon the necessity for a king. But deeper than all the plausible arguments was the perilous fact that the nation was moving away from God and His way for them.

Ever must the Christian leader be on the watch for just such a movement whether it be in a nation or in a Church or in an individual heart. There is a craze for the modernisation and the organisation of all things ; the bringing up to date of customs, behaviour, theology, churches, methods. It is claimed that the old is insufficient for the new demands of an awakening world. Very well, let it be so. But let the servant of the Lord, desirous for the establishment of His kingdom, and zealous for His honour, watch lest fancied progress be a

The Conquest of the Gloom

departure from God and from those old simplicities and sanctities which have been the stronghold and glory of a God-controlled past. There are forces abroad in this land to-day, whether they be called by the names of materialism, or communism, or religious eclecticism which, however up to date they may be, can never be a blessing to India, or lead her one step on the way to God.

But above all these considerations let us learn how Samuel considered this situation in Israel's national life was to be met, and what was supremely the duty of a man of God in this crisis. He expostulated; but expostulation failed (8 : 9-18). He tried to intimidate; but intimidation failed (12 : 16-18), and he realised that the national revolt was so deep that his duty lay in another direction. That was the way of *prayer*, of earnest intercession, of crying unto the Lord for his misguided people. He saw the perils to which they were heading. He visioned the results of this movement from God, and to stem it, to separate somehow his beloved nation from the sure results of their foolishness, Samuel sought the place of prayer, crying, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray." This was surely a new meaning to attach to prayerlessness, that such was sin? We are accustomed to the teaching of the high spiritual *privilege* of prayer, but here Samuel attaches to the act of intercession the value of a *moral duty*, which, to leave unfulfilled, is sin. The crisis was so imminent, the principles and forces at stake so far-reaching, the Divine power in response to believing intercession so available and inexhaustible, that

The Sin of Prayerlessness

Samuel realised that to withdraw himself from the place of prayer, to be careless in this hour of his nation's extremity and foolishness was to commit sin not only against his own soul, or against his people, but was "sin against the Lord."

What an exalted conception of the work of intercession! Would that it were ours to-day! Prayerlessness we consider regrettable, a self-deprivation, a weakness in our Christian life. But do we realise its inherent sinfulness? To gaze upon a brother man struggling in terror with the engulfing waves, and never to throw the lifeline within our reach, cannot be described as "weakness" or "regrettable omission." It is an act of sin as real as if we had cast him into the waters. To see a nation's need, to realise the perils which surrounded her, to have available resources sufficient and to refrain to release them by sacrificial and believing intercession—surely that were direst sin.

Think of India to-day. Was there ever a graver situation in any nation's life? So vast in her population, so divided in her allegiances, so harassed by fears, so roused to national consciousness, so open to every unscrupulous influence! What are we to do in face of all this? Where is the Christian to stand to-day? I claim that for us all the attitude is not where shall I *stand* with regard to the contending forces in this struggle, but how patiently, how believingly can I *kneel* before the Lord, pleading His power and His interposition in the great hour of crisis. God can intervene. History has recorded His wondrous doings. He can touch and change the hearts of men with His gracious and guiding

The Conquest of the Gloom

departure from God and from those old simplicities and sanctities which have been the stronghold and glory of a God-controlled past. There are forces abroad in this land to-day, whether they be called by the names of materialism, or communism, or religious eclecticism which, however up to date they may be, can never be a blessing to India, or lead her one step on the way to God.

But above all these considerations let us learn how Samuel considered this situation in Israel's national life was to be met, and what was supremely the duty of a man of God in this crisis. He expostulated; but expostulation failed (8 : 9-18). He tried to intimidate; but intimidation failed (12 : 16-18), and he realised that the national revolt was so deep that his duty lay in another direction. That was the way of *prayer*, of earnest intercession, of crying unto the Lord for his misguided people. He saw the perils to which they were heading. He visioned the results of this movement from God, and to stem it, to separate somehow his beloved nation from the sure results of their foolishness, Samuel sought the place of prayer, crying, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray." This was surely a new meaning to attach to prayerlessness, that such was sin? We are accustomed to the teaching of the high spiritual *privilege* of prayer, but here Samuel attaches to the act of intercession the value of a *moral duty*, which, to leave unfulfilled, is sin. The crisis was so imminent, the principles and forces at stake so far-reaching, the Divine power in response to believing intercession so available and inexhaustible, that

Samuel realised that to withdraw himself from the place of prayer, to be careless in this hour of his nation's extremity and foolishness was to commit sin not only against his own soul, or against his people, but was "sin against the Lord."

What an exalted conception of the work of intercession! Would that it were ours to-day! Prayerlessness we consider regrettable, a self-deprivation, a weakness in our Christian life. But do we realise its inherent sinfulness? To gaze upon a brother man struggling in terror with the engulfing waves, and never to throw the lifeline within our reach, cannot be described as "weakness" or "regrettable omission." It is an act of sin as real as if we had cast him into the waters. To see a nation's need, to realise the perils which surrounded her, to have available resources sufficient and to refrain to release them by sacrificial and believing intercession—surely that were direst sin.

Think of India to-day. Was there ever a graver situation in any nation's life? So vast in her population, so divided in her allegiances, so harassed by fears, so roused to national consciousness, so open to every unscrupulous influence! What are we to do in face of all this? Where is the Christian to stand to-day? I claim that for us all the attitude is not where shall I *stand* with regard to the contending forces in this struggle, but how patiently, how believingly can I *kneel* before the Lord, pleading His power and His interposition in the great hour of crisis. God can intervene. History has recorded His wondrous doings. He can touch and change the hearts of men with His gracious and guiding

The Conquest of the Gloom

departure from God and from those old simplicities and sanctities which have been the stronghold and glory of a God-controlled past. There are forces abroad in this land to-day, whether they be called by the names of materialism, or communism, or religious eclecticism which, however up to date they may be, can never be a blessing to India, or lead her one step on the way to God.

But above all these considerations let us learn how Samuel considered this situation in Israel's national life was to be met, and what was supremely the duty of a man of God in this crisis. He expostulated; but expostulation failed (8 : 9-18). He tried to intimidate; but intimidation failed (12 : 16-18), and he realised that the national revolt was so deep that his duty lay in another direction. That was the way of *prayer*, of earnest intercession, of crying unto the Lord for his misguided people. He saw the perils to which they were heading. He visioned the results of this movement from God, and to stem it, to separate somehow his beloved nation from the sure results of their foolishness, Samuel sought the place of prayer, crying, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray." This was surely a new meaning to attach to prayerlessness, that such was sin? We are accustomed to the teaching of the high spiritual *privilege* of prayer, but here Samuel attaches to the act of intercession the value of a *moral duty*, which, to leave unfulfilled, is sin. The crisis was so imminent, the principles and forces at stake so far-reaching, the Divine power in response to believing intercession so available and inexhaustible, that

The Sin of Prayerlessness

Samuel realised that to withdraw himself from the place of prayer, to be careless in this hour of his nation's extremity and foolishness was to commit sin not only against his own soul, or against his people, but was "sin against the Lord."

What an exalted conception of the work of intercession! Would that it were ours to-day! Prayerlessness we consider regrettable, a self-deprivation, a weakness in our Christian life. But do we realise its inherent sinfulness? To gaze upon a brother man struggling in terror with the engulfing waves, and never to throw the lifeline within our reach, cannot be described as "weakness" or "regrettable omission." It is an act of sin as real as if we had cast him into the waters. To see a nation's need, to realise the perils which surrounded her, to have available resources sufficient and to refrain to release them by sacrificial and believing intercession—surely that were direct sin.

Think of India to-day. Was there ever a graver situation in any nation's life? So vast in her population, so divided in her allegiances, so harassed by fears, so roused to national consciousness, so open to every unscrupulous influence! What are we to do in face of all this? Where is the Christian to stand to-day? I claim that for us all the attitude is not where shall I *stand* with regard to the contending forces in this struggle, but how patiently, how believingly can I *knelt* before the Lord, pleading His power and His interposition in the great hour of crisis. God can intervene. History has recorded His wondrous doings. He can touch and change the hearts of men with His gracious and guiding

The Conquest of the Gloom

presence. But His power will be released by prayer, and for the Christian Church to be silent, to be careless in this hour, or for the individual Christian to cease to cry unto God for India—that is sin.

Think also of the Church in India. So much in need of revival. Think of those impulses towards wider union so fraught with blessed possibilities for Christendom. What of the need of voluntary service within that Church and those movements towards self-support whose wheels drag so heavily? When shall we see young men giving of themselves freely and with self-sacrifice to the work of the Christian ministry in India? These things shall be when, to us all, with new and gracious conviction, there shall come the assurance that intercession is the never-failing source, and that thus and thus alone can we release the waiting power of God upon His Body in India. Yet a deeper conviction than this even is needed—this solemn truth, that if, in the face of the need of the world we are careless or silent before God, we are committing a sin for which we shall surely answer.

“God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray.”



At the Feet of Jesus

IN the New Testament Mary of Bethany appears three times, and in each of these incidents she is pictured in a particular relationship with her Lord. In the first we are told "She sat at the feet of Jesus" as a learner. Again, "She fell at Jesus' feet" as a suppliant, and finally we see her "anointing the feet of Jesus" as an expression of her adoration and gratitude.

1. The Feast of Tabernacles was a time of joyous remembrance and thanksgiving when, for the duration of the feast, there was much eating and drinking and a pleasing custom of sending out "portions" of food to friends, or to those in less fortunate circumstances. It was at this time that Jesus arrived at the home in Bethany, and we can well imagine that Martha would look upon it as an occasion to bring all her housewifely powers into play, in order that she might have something to set before the Master worthy of Him and of the Feast of national thanksgiving. So Martha planned many "dishes" and dainties, but, to her chagrin, Mary wholly deserted her, and, taking her place at the feet of Jesus, looked into His face and hung on His wonderful words that struck some deep and vibrant chord within her. At last Martha's patience was exhausted, and in tones of complaint she charges Mary with sloth and thoughtlessness. The Master's answer was infinite in its tact and wisdom

The Conquest of the Gloom

"Many portions and dishes are not needful for me, Martha, a little will suffice," and then, spiritualising the situation He adds, "Indeed only one portion is really needful, and Mary has chosen that which is abiding and eternal." What was it in Martha that drew forth His gentle reproof, and in Mary His gracious approval?

It was a difference in valuation. Mary saw the value of communion, while Martha was impatient of anything that tended to be mystical or to savour of the unpractical, and considered that her sister's sitting at the feet of Jesus was nothing but an unnecessary and unkind waste of time.

How applicable are the words of Christ to the present-day estimate of communion! We live in a day which judges all things by the standards of efficiency and result. Methods, organisations, institutions, individuals, and religion itself must all conform to the norm of effectiveness, or else they are looked upon as mere cumbrances to be scrapped or renovated. And, of course, to a certain extent this is wholly right. It was admirable that Martha took such pride in her house and her kitchen. But what Christ emphasised, and what we of this practical age need to learn, is that there are other values, other gains to be had only as we too sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus.

What was Mary's "good portion"? Jesus described it in this way—"something that shall never be taken away from her." As she sat at His feet, she partook of powers eternal; doubts somehow disappeared, and new energies and impulses were born. And so it is difficult to say what

At the Feet of Jesus

really happens when we pray to, and commune with, our Father. But this, at any rate, is certain—something comes into life—power, energies, impulses, which are from above and which nothing of this world's work or its feverish demands can ever destroy.

2. When next we read of Mary of Bethany, she is seen "falling at the feet of Jesus." It was after the death of Lazarus, her brother. Of two facts these sisters were fully assured. They realised that Jesus loved them and that all His dealings with them were beneficent. They knew, too, that He in their time of need had the *power* to help them and to heal their stricken brother. They knew that he had the *willingness* and the *ability* to succour them, so they sent a message to call Him. Jesus did not come. We are not told that He even acknowledged the request or sent an answer. Mary sat with her brother while Martha watched the road, and then Martha took her place at the sick bed while Mary kept vigil for her Lord. But Jesus did not come, and Lazarus died and was buried.

So Martha and Mary sat with their grief. Why this silence? When Jesus had the willingness and the ability to help, why no message and no healing touch? So with these questionings in her heart Martha, when she heard of His approach, went out to meet Jesus, but Mary, whose grief and dismay and doubt were deeper, sat still in the darkened home, and when she, too, was called to meet the Master, all she could do was to fall at His feet with the cry in which faith and doubt struggled for the mastery "If thou hadst been here my brother had not died."

The Conquest of the Gloom

Have we too had this experience? In the hour of darkest sorrow, in the day of sickness, when plans lay shattered, we called on Him of whose love we never had a doubt, and Whose power we knew to be infinite. But no answer came, and in the darkness of grief and disappointment we hardly knew what to do. If this has been or is our experience, let us fall with Mary at His feet, and there in submission and supplication we shall learn the two things that Mary learned—first that just because Christ's love was perfect, He delayed His answer (John 1 : 5, 6) ; and second, that the Master sees better than we do what will be best and most blessed for the Kingdom of God (John 11 : 4). Not in complaint, doubt, or upbraiding shall we learn this, but it comes to us "at the feet of Jesus."

3. Again we see Mary of Bethany "anointing the feet of Jesus." It was an occasion of gratitude and joy, and in the house of Simon the Leper, Jesus and Lazarus were being feasted while Martha as usual served. Mary probably helped behind the scenes, but after the repast, she, diffident yet bold in her gratitude, slipped behind Jesus as he reclined at the table, took from her robe a flask of precious ointment, crushed it over His feet, and then, unbinding her long tresses, she wiped His feet with her hair.

What prodigality of giving ! Think of the gift itself worth £12 or some Rs. 150 ! What saving this must have represented, yet she poured it all out on the feet of her Lord. Then there was the "alabaster box," in all probability a thing fragile and precious in itself. Why not keep it or even

return it to the vendor for a consideration? But this was not Mary's way—the flask must be crushed and offered too. Then why not wipe His feet with her robe or with a towel of finest linen? But she must needs perform this lowly service with her hair, that her sacrifice and adoration might be known to all. This was no ordinary gift, but the adoring gratitude of a soul for her Saviour.

Then all the Judas's in that gathering held up hands of horror. "What a lack of self-control!" "What a waste!" But Jesus said, "A good work"; for surely He saw in this crushed casket a symbol of His broken body that was to release unto the ends of the world the redemptive fragrance of Heaven.

Would that we too in our service and sacrifice had this spirit of abandon and prodigality. We are so careful of the precious ointment of our service and dole it out drop by drop in so grudging a way that but few can catch its fleeting fragrance. We are so concerned to preserve the alabaster casket of our lives from undue strain or loss.

"At the feet of Jesus" in communion; "at the feet of Jesus" in doubt and need; "at the feet of Jesus" in consecrated and prodigal service; this was Mary's place, and it should be ours.



Possession and Beneficence

AS Peter and John took the road towards the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, they were fresh from the soul-stirring experiences of Pentecost, and the enduement of power from on high. I have often been amazed that these men, aflame with the enthusiasms and deep impulses of a new and wonderful experience, should even consider attending the formal, cold and unspiritual services of the Temple. What help could they receive there? What scope there to give expression to those new and tender passions born in the upper room? Yet at the evening hour of prayer, as the setting sun gilded into glory the massive temple gate of Corinthian brass, Peter and John thought it worth while to conform to custom and, even though the temple service might be devoid of life, in the place which was, in spite of its many imperfections, the house of God, to offer their supplications and the tribute of full and grateful hearts. And so I learn anew that to have some personal Pentecost when God in His mercy has visited and revived the soul, is no excuse for separation from those observances and those places of worship which may seem to our newly kindled souls to be formal and dead. They are in need of just those experiences God has been pleased to bestow on us, so that even more scrupulously than

before, should we endeavour to be found with Peter and John on the way to our Gate Beautiful.

The main thought that is before us in this incident centres in the words of Peter to the crippled beggar lying at the gate (Acts 3 : 6) "Such as I have, give I thee." Enshrined in these words is a great and important law of the spiritual life which might be expressed more fully thus :— Possession is the secret of communication ; acquisition is necessary for impartation ; I must have before I can give.

The implications of this law are very far-reaching. I note first of all the *Confident assurance* with which Peter declared that what he possessed he was glad and ready to bestow. He seemed perfectly sure that what he had was adequate for the cripple's need. I can detect no note of hesitancy or doubt in his bold and assured announcement. The needs of this man's body and spirit Peter was convinced could be met by that Christ whom he loved and of whom he was now the confident ambassador. We do not read that after careful consideration of this man's condition, and after further thought as to the demands the situation would make on the resources of Jesus, Peter declared that "he considered it possible that Jesus could meet this man's need!" Far from it. There is the vigorous, certain, and immediate declaration that the Lord whom Peter knew was more than able to deal with the uttermost need of this stricken life.

In the presentation of the Christian message in India, or in any other land, dubiety inevitably spells paralysis. When we cannot say with Peter, "That

The Conquest of the Gloom

message that I have of Christ, of His love and power to save and sanctify, I confidently give," we shall stand before the problems and complexities of the non-Christian world helpless and afraid. Let there be in our hearts the feeling that India does not really need the distinctive message of Christianity; let there be the least doubt about the ability of Christ to deal with the needs of the Outcaste with the pride of the caste-ridden Brahman, or with the dangerous materialism of the student classes, and we shall find ourselves full of fears and dumb. There is a dogmatism that is born of experimental certainty, and which is the basis of spiritual authority and power. This assurance was Peter's as he stood before this stricken man, and he could confidently say, "What I have, give I unto thee."

Another implication of this law is its *inevitableness*. Such as we are and have, *that* we are giving *whether we will or no*. It is not always the crises of life that proclaim the faith that is in us, but the daily contacts, the common task, the spirit of our life that appears in thought and speech and act—these are the ultimate proof of what we have of Christ. Now this that we have of Christ we *are giving* whether we realize it or not in an inevitable bestowal which will work weal or woe in our Christian service. To our colleagues, servants, employees, Indian fellow workers and associates in every sphere we are unconsciously communicating what we know of Christ. Neither the poverty nor the wealth of that personal experience can we disguise or confine. It may be possible for a time to deceive others and even ourselves as to our spiritual

Possession and Beneficence

possessions, but in the end our actual position is revealed by the inevitable operation of this spiritual law.

There is still another implication of this law in its *Limitation*. Only what we have and are can we give. Communication is limited by possession. The more we know and have, the more can we give to others. This holds true in other spheres of life and thought. In the realm of property and material possession, only that can be bestowed which is our own. Possession gives the right as well as the substance of beneficence, and our generosity must be limited by our wealth. In the realm of thought it is also true that only he who has made some department of knowledge his own, is qualified to teach it and to communicate that knowledge to others. The subject must be possessed ere it can be shared in a way that will be beneficial to the recipient, and the limit of the knowledge possessed determines the power of communication.

Even so I am constrained, when I have to deplore the spiritual deficiencies of those around or of those who come within the sphere of my personal influence, to ask a very pregnant question: Does this spiritual poverty not recoil upon me in this fact? "You are not giving because you are not possessing, and so the lives about you are deprived and impoverished." It is tragically possible that personal spiritual wealth may be so limited that there is nothing of real value to give to others about us. The law of the Beautiful Gate is operative—but *against* us, and the lack of abundant life

The Conquest of the Gloom

we so regret, the absence of tangible results in our work, the frequent outcrop of irritating and regrettable incidents we deplore—all these may simply be due to the fact that our own spiritual life is so depleted and spent that we have no vibrant and gripping message to share, and no spiritual enrichment to bestow. We give not because we have not.

The implications of this law carry *Obligations*. And the obligation is surely this—the culture of the personal spiritual experience so that from a rich and abundant life we may be able to give to others. We must increase our possession that we may enlarge our beneficence. We must be able to say, “What I have,” that we may add, “that give I thee.” How can this be done? There is no way but the way of Jesus and the apostles, the way of David Brainerd and of General Gordon—the way of waiting on God in expectant and patient prayer. Not simply with a series of requests let us come to Him, but in fellowship, in silence, in unhurried communion that the resources and powers of the Divine may become our personal possession.

The setting sun transformed the way of the Beautiful Gate into a pathway of burnished gold as Peter and John entered the temple courts, and the evening hymn rose in sweet cadences as they joined the throng of worshippers. Close behind them followed a strange figure convulsed with joy and gratitude. The dignity of the evening worship was sadly disturbed, I fear. It lost its formality and customary dreariness for once. It became a place

Possession and Beneficence

of wonder and awe and eager questioning, and for some, a place of salvation.

And why? Because two men, who a while before had forsaken their dying Lord, had turned to Him again, had experienced the transformations and enrichments of Pentecost, and their possession of Christ and by Christ was the measure of their beneficence to the world.



XVIII

Deep Waters of Obedience

AT the close of the fourth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel we read that "Jesus preached in the synagogues of Galilee," and it is evident that his message and His mercy attracted the attention of all, in so much that to the Lake of Gennesaret the seeking multitudes followed in quest of comfort and healing and that sense of eternal reality which Jesus always inspired. It was only by borrowing the fishing boat of Simon Peter and using that as a vantage ground that he could escape the ever-increasing pressure of the multitude.

In the silence which followed the close of His message, Jesus looked round the fishing boat in which He had found temporary respite from the crowd, and realised at once that the previous night's fishing had been unsuccessful. Was it with some thought of expressing His thanks for the use of the boat that He gave the quiet command, "Now, launch out into the deep and let down your nets?" Or was it that He saw that the critical moment had arrived for Simon Peter and his companions, and He wished for the calm and privacy of the deep waters of the lake so that He might lead them to and through that crisis? Whatever the reason may have been, the command was given, and, in spite of the objection of Peter that the time for successful fishing was passed, the boat was loosed and the

Deep Waters of Obedience

sails set for the deeps where the lake lay blue as the skies above.

If the waters of Galilee were deep that day, so were the experiences into which Simon and his companions entered. From that day they were changed men. New desires were born and new enthusiasms kindled. Not yet were they ready to be the apostles of the great evangel, but they took that day the first steps in the apostolic way. Think of what came to them as in obedience to Christ's command they "launched out into the deep."

There was *Success in the place of Failure*. How they had toiled throughout the night and the cold, grey hours of the dawn, but not a single fish had rewarded their most strenuous effort. With all the fisher's skill and patience they had laid and drawn their nets, but their failure was complete and, as the purple light touched the hills of Galilee, tired and worn out they made for the shore, there to prepare their nets for a further effort. It was then that Jesus came. What a transformation! In broad daylight, an unlikely time, and in the deep waters of the lake, an unlikely place, they achieved a complete and astonishing success, and so abundant was their catch that they could not deal with it alone but had to share it with their friends. Their launching out that day in obedience to the command of Jesus was a venture of faith. To cast their nets in the day and in the deep was contrary to the recognised practices of their occupation. Nevertheless there was something about the Master that inspired obedience, and they were willing to comply with His behest even though it conflicted with

The Conquest of the Gloom

all their preconceived ideas as to the conditions of success. Their obedient faith was richly rewarded by an abundant ingathering. They learned that achievement was not dependent on those conditions we consider to be necessary, but on obedience to the Master. They risked the scorn and derision of their fellow-fishermen, who watched them cast their net in the broad daylight ; but that derision was soon turned to amazement when the deriders were called to share the fruits of Simon's supposed folly.

It is never folly to obey Jesus and to launch out into the deep. Folly, disappointment and unfruitfulness lie along the way of disobedience. The Master is ever calling us to some new venture of faith, to some untried deep of service, to some "launching out" for His dear sake. He disregards those conditions and preconceived notions of ours as to what is essential for success, and appeals only for obedience, taking upon Himself the whole responsibility. Ours but to obey ; and His to bless.

In those deep waters of obedience Simon learned for the first time the real *Nature of Sin*. With all his ruggedness and uncouthness Simon very possibly up to this time possessed quite a sense of his own respectability. It is likely that morally he compared very favourably with the average Jew of his day, in that there may not have been any flagrant moral lapse in his life. However this may have been, it did not suffice him when face to face with Jesus in the perfection of His purity and power. That inward constraint, which led Simon

Deep Waters of Obedience

Peter to obey the command of Jesus to launch out into the deep, became a mighty conviction as he beheld the result of his obedience. Suddenly he realised that he was in the presence of one as holy as He was mighty. His sense of self-satisfaction fell from him like an outworn mantle, and he saw himself for the first time against the revealing background of stainless purity. The meagre moral achievements and fancied rectitude of his life seemed as dust in the balance, and, falling at the feet of Jesus, his self-revelation burst forth in a despairing cry, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

But why "Depart from me"? Surely this new-found Master was not thus to be dismissed. Surely the very revelation that had come to Simon cried aloud for just such a Lord. Surely the last thing that he desired was that this wonder-working, sin-revealing one should pass from his life. Yet Simon's request was born of a spiritual instinct which is essentially true, and that instinct is this, that there must be separation between sin and holiness, between human frailty and divine perfection. The sense of personal unworthiness is born of every fresh vision of the divine, and this is a vital factor in preparation for any real spiritual achievement. Ere the call to high service could come to Simon, there had to be the shattering of his pride and self-satisfaction. This was true of the great souls of the Old Testament of Moses and Joshua, of Isaiah and Jeremiah. It is true to the facts of Christian biography. A vision of the Lord exalted in holiness will always lead to a conviction

The Conquest of the Gloom

of unclean lips (Isa. 6: 1-6; see also Jer. 1: 6; Exod. 3: 5, 11; 4: 10).

This humbling and enabling vision of personal unworthiness came to Simon Peter as a blessing of Obedience. Thus shall it be with us. To know the real nature of sin in its power to erect a barrier between the soul and God; to learn to look upon it with the mind of Jesus; to experience that searching and sanctifying revelation we must launch out in the deep waters of obedience.

But this was not all that came to Peter and his companions on the lake. We read that after the revelation of his personal unworthiness, Simon received what was at the same time an assurance and a *call to service*. "Fear not," said Jesus, "from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Nor did he dare to remind the Master of the fruitless fishing of the past night, for his mind was full of wonder at the success of his effort when, in obedience to this quiet but assuring voice, he had cast his net. We can well imagine that there opened before Simon a wonderful vista of possibility, a vision of what service would really mean when undertaken under the direction of this Master who had entered his life. The failure of the past and the achievement of the present hour was vividly present in bold contrast to his mind, and he realised that the words of Jesus were not merely a *call* but an *assurance* that in the way of obedience lay the secret of fruitful service. Success in the introduction of men into the Kingdom of God was another thing to be found in the deep waters of obedience.

This is ever true for the disciple of Jesus. As

Deep Waters of Obedience

we "launch out" in faith, in obedience, in Christ-directed effort, we shall draw men to God—draw them by our faith, and self-sacrifice and earnest presentation of the message of Life. Not in knee-deep shallows where children play, will great things be done for God. For those who, in simple yet costly obedience to the call of the Son of God, are ready for the heights and depths and lengths and breadths of His holy will—for those there is reserved an achievement of service that will be as amazing as it will be abiding. But the waters of obedience are always deep. They are waters to swim in. Only strong men of God, in reliance on Him, may therein launch forth, however frail their barque may be. Yet they are not waters of fear or of danger, but great deeps of love where men may learn the high secrets of success and holiness and service.



The Conquest of the Gloom

of unclean lips (Isa. 6 : 1-6 ; see also Jer. 1 : 6 ; Exod. 3 : 5, 11 ; 4 : 10).

This humbling and enabling vision of personal unworthiness came to Simon Peter as a blessing of Obedience. Thus shall it be with us. To know the real nature of sin in its power to erect a barrier between the soul and God ; to learn to look upon it with the mind of Jesus ; to experience that searching and sanctifying revelation we must launch out in the deep waters of obedience.

But this was not all that came to Peter and his companions on the lake. We read that after the revelation of his personal unworthiness, Simon received what was at the same time an assurance and a *call to service*. "Fear not," said Jesus, "from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Nor did he dare to remind the Master of the fruitless fishing of the past night, for his mind was full of wonder at the success of his effort when, in obedience to this quiet but assuring voice, he had cast his net. We can well imagine that there opened before Simon a wonderful vista of possibility, a vision of what service would really mean when undertaken under the direction of this Master who had entered his life. The failure of the past and the achievement of the present hour was vividly present in bold contrast to his mind, and he realised that the words of Jesus were not merely a *call* but an *assurance* that in the way of obedience lay the secret of fruitful service. Success in the introduction of men into the Kingdom of God was another thing to be found in the deep waters of obedience.

This is ever true for the disciple of Jesus. As

Deep Waters of Obedience

we "launch out" in faith, in obedience, in Christ-directed effort, we shall draw men to God—draw them by our faith, and self-sacrifice and earnest presentation of the message of Life. Not in knee-deep shallows where children play, will great things be done for God. For those who, in simple yet costly obedience to the call of the Son of God, are ready for the heights and depths and lengths and breadths of His holy will—for those there is reserved an achievement of service that will be as amazing as it will be abiding. But the waters of obedience are always deep. They are waters to swim in. Only strong men of God, in reliance on Him, may therein launch forth, however frail their barque may be. Yet they are not waters of fear or of danger, but great deeps of love where men may learn the high secrets of success and holiness and service.



The Bearing of the Burden

ACCORDING to the language and thought of Scripture, the burdens of life can be classified in a two-fold way—those which are contrary to the will of God, and on the other hand those that are contained in His will and purpose for us. In Psalm 38 and the first 12 verses we have a glimpse of that kind of burden that is ever contrary to the mind and will of God—the burden of the guilt of sin. In the 4th verse the writer speaks of his burdened conscience as an ever-increasing load which threatens to overwhelm him. On account of this he had lost his health (v. 3), his joy (v. 6), his courage (v. 10), and his friends (v. 11). He attributes his physical, social and spiritual disabilities to this load from which he seems unable to obtain deliverance.

The sense of sin as a burden upon the conscience is a blessed law of life. It is in the spiritual realm what pain is in the physical—a danger signal, a warning of an unhealthy condition, an indication of warring elements within. It drives us to seek medical aid. It is not in itself a disease, but a symptom of a diseased or wounded condition, and is actually of the greatest value in the diagnosis and treatment of the malady. Thus with the sense of a burden and a guilt in sin. That burden is not in itself the disease, but is a warning of an interruption in the law of God's will for the soul which is

The Bearing of the Burden

spiritual health, and it fulfils its high purpose when it drives the soul to the soul's Physician for healing and cleansing.

So I must see God's loving hand even in this burden. In His mercy He has given to sin this power of creating within the conscience and life a sense of discomfort and trouble and disquietude, that by these we may be led to discover the real cause in the transgression of His holy will. But that burden in its real and ultimate form can be dealt with only by a Cross. The sense of burden in sin is equivalent to the sense of the guilt of sin. Because sin is guilt it burdens. That burden of guilt, therefore, can be removed only by being borne, and here I arrive at the very heart of the atonement. Our Lord removed that burden of guilt by bearing it—and bearing it away (see Urdu translation, "utha le jata hai"). Not the crown of thorns; not the brutal tearing of the nails; not the fierce ignominy of the Cross of shame; not the piercing spear—none of these things in themselves killed the Prince of Life. His heart was broken by the self-imposed load of the world's guilt, and in that broken body and shed blood I find redemption from the burden of sin.

But there are other burdens which must be borne in life that we cannot say are contrary to God's purpose for the individual. There is ill-health, sorrow, poverty, loneliness and the heavy responsibilities of life. All of us have some of these to bear, and some perhaps have all. What shall we say of them? Is there any guidance from Scripture as to how they are to be dealt with?

The Conquest of the Gloom

The first law suggested is *Comprehend your Burdens*. In Psalm 55 : 22 the Psalmist cries, "Cast thy burden on the Lord." But the marginal rendering is not thy "burden," but "thy gift," or "that which He hath given thee." This is surely new light on the nature of those things and conditions of life which we have considered as burdens to be borne. We are to consider them as gifts of a loving Father, all-wise in His love. They are essential to the highest well-being of life. They are not drags to the soul's progress, but safeguards on the way.

Some time ago I watched a small sailing vessel being loaded with great stones which seemed a weighty and useless cargo. But I was informed that they were being loaded as ballast. The vessel was safe in the harbour, sheltered from the tempests of the open sea, but without this hidden burden she would fare ill as she faced the buffetings of the storms ahead. Her load was not a burden but a blessing.

Who has not gazed in delight and wonder at the vivid crimson of the virginian creeper as the autumn lays a chill hand upon its foliage. Shall the plant complain of the cold breath of the winter wind? Nay. In this is the secret of its distinctive beauty and the glory of its varied tints. The approach of winter is not its burden but its blessing.

Let us too look at those things we call burdens with a new comprehension of their real contribution to the deepest well-being of life and of character. That ill-health, or sorrow, or poverty, or loneliness—is it in reality a burden? Is there not a

The Bearing of the Burden

gift hidden there? For these are sometimes needed as ballast in the voyage of life to steady us in the hours of testing and preserve us amid the buffetings of the way. Or the chill wind of adversity is required to bring to light those beauties of soul that otherwise would be concealed. Our burdens must be comprehended as His gifts.

Another law suggested in the same verse is *Transfer your Burdens*. "Cast thy burden on the Lord and He shall sustain thee." We do well to consider with care each word of this injunction. It is not a method of getting rid of the burden, but an instruction as to how it can be borne. We are to roll the burden on the Lord and we shall find that He bears *not* the "Burden" but the "Burdened One"; not thy load, but thee. If those loads of life are in reality blessings and gifts from a loving Father, meant to discipline and stabilize and beautify life why should He remove them? There is a deeper need and a more enriching way. He bears the burdened, ministering strength to accept the load so that the burdened one may not be overwhelmed, and at the same time may enjoy the enrichment of that gift.

The great example of this is St. Paul and His burden—that thorn in his flesh. How he laboured in repeated, and we can well imagine, in agonizing petition that this burden be removed. How he endeavoured to cast this on the Lord that God might bear it away. But thus it could not be. There was a ministry for St. Paul in that thorny load that an all-wise Father saw he required. So the answer was the New Testament rendering of

The Conquest of the Gloom

the words of the Psalmist. "My grace is sufficient for thee. This burden in which there is so much of blessing for thee and the world I cannot remove. My grace I bestow upon thee. In this be thy perfect sufficiency."

What then, O follower of Jesus, is thy special disability or burden? Is there aught of spiritual enrichment, or of reliance on God, or of humility, or of the desire to pray born of that burden? If there be, then it is a blessing and cannot be removed without the impoverishment of thy spirit. Nevertheless "cast thy burden on the Lord" with all its care, and though it be not removed, He shall sustain thee with the utmost resources of His grace. As the blind preacher of Scotland from the depth of a personal experience has beautifully said, "It is not the trampling of care under your feet, but the transference of care to another bosom. Destroy it not; ignore it not; bury it not; escape it not; but take it up tenderly, fold it up cautiously, and lay it on the heart of thy Lord."

Jesus Himself suggests the third law of the burden in those profound words of Matt. 11 : 29, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." It is the law of *The Sharing of the Burden*. By these words Jesus admits that in the life of His followers there will be that which He describes as a "Burden," and this is to be dealt with by a method He describes as a "yoke." Let us note that the method

The Bearing of the Burden

of Jesus is not the removal of the burden, but the sharing of it. This is the whole significance of a yoke—that which unites the labourers in a common effort towards the accomplishment of a common task. Jesus never taught that the Christian life was to inaugurate a burdenless existence, but He did teach that burdens were to be borne by being shared with Him as the yoke-Fellow, the Helper, the Paracletos—the one “called alongside to help.”

There is a classic instance of the sharing of a burden to be found in a comparison of Matt. 15 : 21 with Rom. 16 : 13. If it be the case, and there are good grounds for believing it to be so, that the Rufus mentioned by St. Paul as a choice member of the Roman Church was the son of Simon the Cyrenian who helped Jesus to bear His cross, then we are able to reconstruct something of what must have happened.

It would have been unwise for the Roman authorities to compel a local man from the crowd who followed Christ to Calvary to help Him with the cross so cursed to the Jew. So from amid that throng one was laid hold upon—a foreigner by his speech and dress—and, in spite of his vigorous protests, was compelled to bow himself beneath that crushing load. Thus Simon and the Son of God together climbed the hill called Calvary. No willing sharing of this burden, for I can hear Simon's protests, prayers and cursings as he laboured with his Lord. And soon he saw the cross bear Jesus high on its cruel arms. He saw His patience, heard His prayer and beheld Him die. From that moment all life was changed for Simon.

The Conquest of the Gloom

The burden he had shared became his blessing and his glory. His home became a home of love. His wife and sons learned the father's secret and followed in the way of life, and St. Paul could write of those "choice ones" and "a very mother to me."

Upon the threshold of a new year which holds for all within its secret grasp so much that is unknown, let us learn to deal thus with the burdens and responsibilities of life—comprehend them, transfer them, share them.



The Decrease that is Increase

AFTER the marriage feast at Cana Jesus did not return to Nazareth, for the feast of the Passover was at hand, and since the age of twelve years He had visited Jerusalem every year for this great national occasion. But now Jesus was to participate, not as a visitor, but as the Messiah. During His visit to Jerusalem there occurred His cleansing of the temple and the memorable interview with Nicodemus. As the crowds began to return to their homes, we find that Jesus, too, turned from Jerusalem back to the river Jordan, to the place where He had received the baptism of water at the hands of John and the baptism of the Holy Spirit from His Father in heaven. It is highly significant that He should have returned to this spot, seemingly to renew those sacred memories of that unique experience when He was equipped for His great task of the world's redemption.

John the Baptist was not there when Jesus returned to Jordan. The rulers of the Jews had declared war against him, and he had sought refuge outside the territory over which they had jurisdiction. Hence, he had passed on to Samaria, and at a little place called Aenon, or "the place of springs," he continued his work of preaching and administering baptism unto repentance. But the

The Conquest of the Gloom

crowds which had first followed John had been attracted by Jesus. His miracles of power and His teaching of love had made an irresistible appeal, and from all quarters the crowds came to Him. Even John's disciples transferred their allegiance to Jesus and the Baptist was left with a mere handful of disciples. A troublesome Jew, probably an emissary of the Sanhedrin, got into argument with John's remaining disciples regarding some point of Jewish ritual, and taunted them with the fact that all men seemed to be forsaking John and turning to the new Teacher. So with their hearts full of grief and bitterness his disciples came to him and poured out all their doubts and fear.

It was on hearing this that John gave utterance to that remarkable statement which will forever attest him as a man of the highest moral and spiritual greatness. Turning to them in their chagrin, he said quietly and emphatically, "He must increase and I must decrease." And these words have been rendered by Dr. Moffatt, "He must wax and I must wane," and by Paley as, "It is for Him to go on growing and for me to be ever getting less."

Think, first, of this *answer of John the Baptist*. We can imagine how his disciples would come to him on hearing of the success of Jesus and His work. "Master, it is too bad. Your testimony to Jesus on the banks of the Jordan was too generous and whole-hearted. See the result of your generosity. You are now deserted and we alone remain of your disciples. The others have left you and now follow this new Teacher. Also the crowds

The Decrease that is Increase

that used to come to you are gone and but few now listen. Master, why is this permitted to happen when you have served God so faithfully and endangered your life to obey His call ? ”

But this attitude found no response whatever in the great and generous heart of John. There was no place of jealousy in his character. “Do you not understand, O my followers, that this is part of my task ? This is part of my joy. This must happen if the Kingdom of God is to come. How can I bear grudge ; how can I give place in my thought to jealousy ; how can I be otherwise than glad when I see the success and the coming of the Kingdom of God ? Did I not clearly say that I am but a herald, a voice, the preparer of the way ? This my joy is, therefore, fulfilled. He must increase and I must decrease.”

To be able to say this from the heart is probably one of the outstanding marks of moral and spiritual greatness. The success and fame of a Shakespeare in the realm of literature, of a Wesley in the realm of religious thought, or of a Lincoln in the realm of politics, does not awake in us jealousy or envy. The consideration of such characters and their work awakes in us feelings of admiration and aspiration. We are not in competition with them, nor are we their contemporaries. But the personal problem arises when some one running just behind us in the race of life passes us and leaves us behind, and we have to take a second or a third or an even more inferior place—then is the test of our moral greatness. Can we not simply tolerate their success, but can we rejoice in it ? Can we from the

The Conquest of the Gloom

heart see their achievement and be glad in it? Can we hear them praised, see their advancement and yet have no place for jealousy? This is one of the tests of moral achievement. To be able to see others more successful, more accomplished, more famous; to see other plans than ours adopted with success; to have this experience and to preserve one's heart from bitterness and envy and jealousy is, indeed, a Christ-like achievement.

This law of the increase of Christ and the decrease of self is the only way of growth in Christian character and in the knowledge of God. In the realization of a Christ-like life, we have no greater enemy than ourselves. The "ego" and all its manifestations are for ever opposed to the gentle and sacrificial rule of Christ in the heart. What an amazing number of forms the ego takes! There is self-will, self-interest, selfishness, self-indulgence, self-love, self-confidence, and all these express the increase of self and therefore the decrease of the rule of Christ. Read carefully the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians and note the expression "in Christ." That is to say, all that comes to the spiritual life through Christ's indwelling and regal presence. We shall see that all Christian virtue depends on His rule, and consequently the increase of His rule, by which these gifts of His presence will be multiplied and enhanced, must ever be the aim of the follower of Jesus. And He Himself has said that "no man can serve two masters," and therefore for the increase of Christ and His rule there must be the decrease of self and its rule, so that the declaration of John the Baptist is true to

the highest needs of the personal life : " He must increase and I must decrease."

Again this law suggests a solution of the problem of the relationship of Church and Mission. The present tension in many quarters is undoubtedly a reflection of the general national feeling, and of the impatience with outside control of Indian affairs, whether it be in Church or State. It seems to me that the relationship that has existed between Church and Mission might be stated in the following way : First of all the principle was, " Let the Mission increase whether the Church increases or not." This was a necessary stage when the work was commencing, and the Gospel had to be preached before the Church could be founded. Hence all efforts had to be concentrated on the furtherance of Missionary activity. But this stage is passed. In the second stage the principle might be thus expressed : " Let the Mission increase and the Church increase too." This has been the endeavour and must ever be the aim of all missionary effort, and we have to be profoundly grateful for the results which have come from a century of the operation of this principle. Yet the problems of the relationship of Church and Mission have gradually been growing and are now in some cases acute. The question arises, Is the Church or is the Mission the God-ordained means for the establishment of the Kingdom of God ? Is the Church or the Mission the " body of Christ ? " Has the time not now come when we shall have to bring into drastic operation this law of John the Baptist and say, " Let the Mission decrease, and the Church increase ? "

The Conquest of the Gloom

But let us note in this connection that even though Jesus had appeared and had commenced his work, John did not become Jesus' disciple nor did he lose his identity in the One Whose way he had come to prepare. He passed on to Aenon and there continued his work, breaking new ground for the coming of Jesus and His message. It would have been easier for John to retire into the wilderness again having seen the arrival of the One Whom he was to announce. But this was not his way, and so he passed on to new fields of conquest until death silenced his voice for ever. And I venture to see in this the task of the Mission in the future. It shall not cease to exist. Its work will never be done till all have heard the Gospel and its liberating message. New and unoccupied fields lie awaiting the message. Long closed doors are opening everywhere. The Mission must pass on to Aenon.

But a note of warning is needed here. If the Mission is to decrease and the Church to increase, it must ever be realized that it is not simply to be an increase of the East as against the West. The whole matter must be raised above the question of race. The solution does not lie in the Indianization of the Mission. You can devolve responsibility or authority or finance but you can never devolve spiritual power. It must be the increase of the "body of Christ," an increase in the spirit of devotion, an elevation of the whole life and thinking and consecration of the Church which is His body—"the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

Finally the principle of the increase of Christ and the decrease of self must be observed in any

The Decrease that is Increase

successful presentation of the Christian message of salvation. The messenger must be hidden in the message. Anything that detracts from Christ as central must be done away with. We must guard against the magnifying of creed or sect or denomination or the peculiarities of belief and practice as against the simple presentation of Jesus as the world's Saviour. Not the uplifting of theological formula, but of the Living Christ, will draw all men unto Himself. Denominational selfishness, sectarian exclusiveness must decrease if Christ is to increase in our presentation of Him in India. This and this alone must be the principle at the heart of all successful Church union. Much that separates and perpetuates barriers of disunion, I very much fear, must be classed as sectarian selfishness or a disguised form of a denominational "ego." When the things that divide, mostly things in the ultimate immaterial and non-vital, are decreased and Christ Who is central to all is increased, and all our thinking made subservient to the great task of presenting Him and His message to India, then, and then alone, the Church will unite in a real body of Christ, whose one aim is to express the saving purposes of its Head.



“Worthy is the Lamb”

IT is a marvellous scene that is depicted by the aged Apostle. He conceives the hosts of heaven as gathered around the throne. In the midst of the throne and round about the throne are the four living creatures full of eyes. Next in order come the four and twenty elders with their golden crowns and harps and spotless robes. Then the throngs of the angelic host, and finally ten thousand times ten thousand of the redeemed from every kindred and tongue and people and nation. And they are all engaged in the perfect adoration and worship of the One upon the throne. He was the centre of heaven's praise. It was the occupant of the throne who drew forth this universal homage. What magnificent figure of majesty should we expect to see as the object of heaven's adoration! Surely some radiant and glorious figure must be seated there to inspire the hallelujahs of the redeemed! I expect to behold some type of irresistible authority and power as the cynosure of all eyes, the centre of that galaxy of glory.

But what do we read? “In the midst of the throne stood a Lamb as it had been slain.” No majestic and awe-inspiring figure this—no exhibition of kingly might and authority, but a slain Lamb, the type of humility and gentleness and sacrifice. I can understand a Lamb as a fitting

symbol for an *altar* but not for a *throne*. Yet it is this figure of sacrificial death which is upon the throne of heaven, and before which the countless hosts of the redeemed adore.

How different is the estimate of the world. When the nations of the earth choose some symbol as a national emblem, I read of the Eagle of Germany and of ancient Rome, the Bear of Russia, the Dragon of China, and the Lion of Britain—all types of voracity and might. These are held before the world as suitable emblems of rule and authority. But what heaven enthrones, adores, bows before in universal and eternal praise and worship is a "Lamb slain." The Eagle may drag its feathers in the dust of defeat and ignominy, or pass into the oblivion of history. The Bear and Dragon with all their ferocity are yet creatures of a day. The Lion does not always hold the field. But strange to say, the miracle of the ages is just this, that "The Lamb slain before the foundation of the world" has ascended the throne, and from everlasting to everlasting is the theme and object of heaven's adoring worship.

In other words, it is just this—that in the eyes of heaven the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary is foundational, central and all-important. *This*, and this alone, rendered heaven choral with eternal praises. They could well have sung a song of His humility, or His self-restraint, or His wonder-working power, or His courage, or His moral beauty and lofty teaching. But it was not these facts, great and notable as they are, that attracted heaven. It was Christ's atoning death

for sin—His outpoured blood—His ascent of the hill called Calvary.

You and I need to learn this "Song of the Lamb" to-day. There is so much admiration of Christ's life and teaching and work. There are so many points where Christian and non-Christian are agreed about Jesus that we are in real danger of halting there. True it is that Christ is unique in *whatever* way you may look at Him, in His perfection of moral beauty, His perfection of power, His perfection of precept. But these alone are not a *Gospel* for a needy world. Heaven's estimate is correct—*must* be correct for they see "face to face." That fact, in virtue of which Christ ascends the throne of the ages, is simply this—that He gave His life for the sins of the World. If this is not central to our presentation of the gospel, we are not in line with the mind of heaven. If adoration of the "Slain Lamb" is not the dominant note in our message, we are out of tune with the harmony of heaven. We are holding out to India an "emasculated" gospel which can never lay a mighty and possessive grip on needy souls. Admiration of Christ is certainly a step nearer, but it is not consecration to Christ. It was heaven's realisation of what the "Slain Lamb" had accomplished by His death, that drew forth that universal homage. Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, and hast made us unto our God a kingdom and priests and we shall reign on the earth." His death was not that of a martyr dying for the truth. History records many such grand and noble

deaths. Jesus died as a Saviour in a unique sense. His sacrifice was vicarious and redemptive. The Lamb slain on the High Altar of Calvary by His death liberated a divine energy upon mankind which can redeem from sin, and introduce into a new life of communion, power, and intercession.

No wonder heaven acclaimed "Worthy is the Lamb." No wonder the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders cast their crowns before the throne, and poured out the vials of the prayers of the saints. No wonder the angels and the redeemed burst into a pean of praise. They had experienced the efficacy of His atoning death; they realised the love that stooped to Calvary; they understood now what it had meant for the Son of God to leave the "bosom of the Father" and the glories of the throne.

"Worthy is the Lamb . . . to receive"—our homage and service and worship, and that central place in our message and thought which was ascribed to Him by the hosts of Heaven.



"Is there any Word from the Lord?"

THIS was the anxious question of a vacillating and somewhat fearful monarch (Jer. 37: 17). The policy of Zedekiah had led him into deep waters, and his weak nature kept him there. Neither his fathering by the prophet Jeremiah, nor the obvious signs within his kingdom and without could keep him in the way of safety and reliance on Jehovah (37: 2). He became a ready tool in the hands of his unscrupulous courtiers who sought for a temporary safety in an intrigue with Egypt. And, indeed, it seemed as if the gloomy thunderings of Jeremiah were, after all, in vain, and baseless. For the Chaldean siege of Jerusalem was raised when they heard of the approach of the Egyptian host. The prophet was seemingly covered with ridicule, for his dire announcement of approaching doom was proving false, and though he knew that the relief tendered by Egypt was but temporary, it would appear that his influence was so far lost, that he planned to leave Jerusalem for some more secluded spot to which, for a time, he might retire. But as he was preparing to leave the city, he was arrested as a deserter, and, in spite of all his protestations of innocence, cast into close confinement.

Zedekiah the king was, however, anything but

happy. When closely besieged by the Chaldeans, he had sought out Jeremiah with the request, "Pray now unto the Lord our God for us," although even at that time he was in league with Egypt, a policy which the prophet had always strongly denounced. The higher nature of Zedekiah, inherited from his father Joash, whose reign of thirty-one years had seen such spiritual revival in the nation, realized to some extent the perils into which he was being irresistibly drawn by the follies of his court, and the weakness of his own nature. His sense of spiritual values was keen enough to know full well that Jeremiah was right and that he was wrong. The temporary relief afforded by the approach of the Egyptian host for a while dulled his fears, but when the days passed and he saw signs that the imprisoned prophet's words were coming true, and that the Egyptian army was but a broken reed upon which to lean, he called Jeremiah from the dungeons of Jonathan's house, had him conveyed secretly to the palace, and there made the anxious and rather shamed inquiry, "Is there any word from the Lord?"

If we consider this question in the light of the circumstances and the character of Zedekiah, the first thing that suggests itself is that this was the enquiry of a man who had an altogether erroneous and *inadequate conception of the meaning of prayer*. One idea he seemed to hold was that prayer is a *form of magic*. When the Chaldeans were thundering at the gates, and the evening sky was lit with their myriad camp fires, he had sent Jehucal and Zephaniah, priestly representatives, to Jere-

miah to implore his prayers in the national crisis. Surely it was a sad commentary on the real state of the spiritual advisers of the nation, that the king in his hour of greatest need, could not trust in the ministrations of the priestly class as represented by these men, but had to send them to one whom he knew to be a man of God. Yet his request reveals a radical misconception of prayer. He felt that somehow or other he must have on his side Jeremiah's intercessions. He had great faith in their magical power. He longed for this man's prayers, but he rejected his appeals. He besought his assistance, but he spurned his advice.

There is something very modern about this old misconception of the value of prayer. How often the good advice of parent or pastor or friend has been spurned, and yet, when calamity has overtaken us, it is to those whose advice would have saved us to whom we go for prayer and help. Zedekiah knew not how to pray. He had simply blundered on in folly after folly, and now the magic of Jeremiah's prayers was expected to extricate him. But that is not possible. The prayer that is of value in adversity, is the prayer that is practised in prosperity. There is nothing magical about the operation of the law of prayer. The soul that has never made a practice of prayer can hardly expect suddenly, in the face of sorrow, or sickness, or distress, to find relief in the forced prayers of some great extremity. In His mercy God does hear and deliver even such, but the prayer of power is the prayer that is a habit of life.

This is beautifully illustrated in the life of Daniel.

Prayer was his daily habit, and dawn, high noon and the setting sun saw him on his knees with his window open towards Jerusalem. So when the crisis came, and the machinations of his enemies seemed to have woven a web from which there was no escape, it was not difficult for him quietly to turn to the open window "as aforetime," and, amid the gathering storm, to use the resource he had found sufficient when all was well, and the sun was shining in a cloudless sky. The assistance that is rendered by prayer in some great need or extremity is nothing more supernatural than that which is ministered daily to the life of the prayerful habit. If prayer is *much* to us in "every day's most quiet need," it will be *all* to us in the grave crisis of some special day.

Another error that Zedekiah made was that he conceived prayer as a means of *securing the acquiescence of God* in his plans. His mind was quite made up to seek assistance in an agreement with Egypt, although all the weight of Jeremiah's influence was exerted against such an unholy alliance. The prayers of Jeremiah were expected to secure the acquiescence of God in a plan that Zedekiah well knew did not conform to His will as expressed through His prophet. The king's conscience was uneasy, and he considered that a request for prayer might put him right with the prophet and with God. He did not "commit his way unto the Lord," yet he desired that God "should direct his steps." Even as he was seeking the intercessory power of the man of God, the armies of Egypt were on the march. He desired the divine blessing

The Conquest of the Gloom

upon a policy which was not the divine will. He failed to realize that the only safe line of action for the nation or for the individual is first of all to adopt the way of the will of God, and then upon that there *must* rest the blessing of God.

And this misconception is also a modern one. We are more concerned to secure the blessing of God on our plan, than to make sure that our plan is the divine will. So the whole is conceived, decided upon and put into action. We become committed to it, and then, because we would not be without the goodwill of God, we beseech His blessing. We have often forgotten that the divine will is the expression of the divine character, and that no blessing can be expected upon the life or upon the policy that holds within its conception some principle of action that may contravene that holy will. Such a blessing would involve a contradiction within the divine character. No. Let prayer precede the plan, and blessing must follow it.

But there is a sense in which this question of Zedekiah's *must ever be in the heart* and upon the lips of the earnest servant of Christ. "Is there any word from the Lord?" is not to be an isolated question, but an attitude of life. For the follower of Christ there can be no sphere of activity to which this reverent inquiry should not be addressed. To hear that "word from the Lord" speaking reproof and guidance and courage is the high privilege of every child of God, and without this assurance we shall lose our way. How much misdirection of energy and money would be saved

Is there any Word from the Lord

if deliberative bodies of the Church of Christ would adopt this principle ere embarking on some elaborate campaign. The practice of waiting to hear "that word from the Lord" is, alas, not in keeping with the modern demand for speed and executive ability and efficiency. And so the pace is hurried and the plan is executed only to find in the long run that, with resources exhausted and the goal still far distant, we have to retrace our steps, rebuild the altar, and turn humbly with the enquiry, "Is there any word from the Lord?"

And it is even so with the private life of the disciple. In the realm of business interests and home relationships and Christian service there is no greater blessing than to find out that "word from the Lord," and no greater loss than to be without it. It is an attitude of quiet inquiry that must be cultivated. Nor let us think that such an attitude will make for a visionary or inefficient life. On the contrary it tends to the highest efficiency, for it eliminates waste of energy, removes the necessity for those numerous restarts in one's life and work that are so sad to see, and gives that rest of soul without which life in this modern world can be so unhappy and so busy and so futile.

I like the emphatic certainty with which the prophet Jeremiah answered King Zedekiah. "Is there any word from the Lord?" and the brief and pointed answer comes without hesitancy, "There is." There is always *some word from the Lord*. It may not be the word we expect or welcome, but it will always be the word we *need*. I do not imagine that Zedekiah was overjoyed at

the announcement of Jeremiah (17). But nevertheless it was the word of correction he needed, and had he hearkened to it and to the other words from the Lord (38 : 17-21) the final tragedy of his slain sons and blinded captivity might never have taken place (2 Kings 25 : 7).

"Is there any word from the Lord" when sickness lays us low, and upon the bed of pain and incapacity we are faced with need and financial responsibility and the unaccomplished task? "Is there any word from the Lord" for the soul in adversity when the world is unkind and the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" fall thick and fast about us? "Is there any word from the Lord" when work must be carried on in loneliness and opposition and with no cheer of achievement? "Is there any word from the Lord" when temptation is mighty, and the power of evil comes upon us like a flood? And in the day of bereavement, when we have laid to rest all that remains of some life that was knit to ours with a mighty and tender love, is there then "any word from the Lord"?

The prophet cries, "There is!" Jesus proclaims, "Verily I say unto thee, there is!" Ten thousand lives down the centuries cry "There is!" Then in assurance and patient prayer let me hear that "word from the Lord."



XXIII

The Retrospect of Sin

THE story of David's fall is recorded in Scripture without comment and without excuse. Sinful conception, deceit, adultery, murder, follow one another with awful suddenness, and when all the sordid detail is told, we are left with the tragic picture of a saint nearly fifty years old, who has walked with God and seen His power, and whose heart was ever aflame with love and praise, casting all this aside, and entering on a way of life that darkened with calamity after calamity until the very end.

About one year must have passed between the crime and the divine message through the prophet Nathan. What a silent and stricken year for the "sweet singer of Israel!" He was too good a man, and had tasted too deeply of the joys of trust, to find any permanent satisfaction in the way of sin. "Nobody buys a little passing pleasure in evil at so dear a rate, or keeps it for so short a time as a good man." Grief and remorse, like inward fires, scorched his soul. The face of God was hidden from him in the darkness of a seared conscience. His harp was silent, and his lips sealed. And then there came Nathan's message which seemed to break down all the hardness of the impenitent year, and to wound him to his healing. It must have been about this time that Psalms 51 and 32

The Conquest of the Gloom

were written, and in these David poured forth all his grief and penitence and prayer. In them he looks upon his sin, not in the heat of passionate desire, but in the light of a year of misery and alienation from God.

Psalm 51 might be described as a study of *sin in retrospect*. And this will be a true estimate of the nature and depredation of evil in its relation to the human spirit. Passion had died. The attraction of evil was gone. David was terribly disillusioned. For a brief day of fancied joy he had bartered his soul and all the peace of an unbroken communion with God. And now, from amid the cold ashes of his spent passion, he looks back on his crime, and the sad experience of the past year finds expression at last in the pleadings and confessions of the 51st Psalm.

As David looked back, his sin appeared as *an undying memory*. Time, which he had trusted would heal the wound and bring forgetfulness, had played him false. He had tried to cast the whole sordid business into the past to be ignored and forgotten as a regrettable incident. To his horror his sin "was ever before him." He relegated it to the past; it cried aloud in the present. The more he sought to forget, the mightier became the memory. In every duty he heard the bleating of the ewe lamb, until all life seemed to throb and thunder with the reverberations of his sin. The labours of his high offices were no relief; for there Joab confronted him. The battlefield was alive with memories of the murdered Uriah; for the blood of a brave man cried aloud. Nor was the palace a place of

The Retrospect of Sin

forgetfulness, for Bathsheba was there. There was no oblivion, for the memory was within.

This was true of St. Paul, though in another relationship. What a poignancy of regret and unforgetting is expressed in the simple words, "who before was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious!" How the memory of broken homes and brutal cruelties lived with him for ever, so that he has been heard to say

Saints did I say? With your remembered faces,
Dear men and women whom I sought and slew;
Ah when we mingle in the heavenly places,
How will I weep to Stephen and to you!
Oh for the strain that rang to our reviling
Still, when the bruised limbs sank upon the sod,
Oh for the eyes that looked their last in smiling,
Last on this world here, but their first on God!

It is just in this that there lies part of the awful folly and punishment of sin. Somehow we are so fashioned that neither old age nor occupation, neither the highest achievements of life nor its most prized endowments can ever erase the memory of sin. Strive as we may, in the soul's most solemn and most holy moments there arise disturbing visions of the past. Sins which, by the mercy and love of God have been forgiven, spring into terrible and living reality, and come between the soul and God. In the hour of devotion, when mind and affection reach out to clasp the divine, we recoil with horror from the touch of that cold and clinging memory of some long-past sin. What folly then to speak lightly of "having one's fling" in the heyday of youth! What folly to "sow wild

oats" on the virgin soil of memory, for the life-long harvest is this—the *unforgettability* of sin!

Another thing that David realized as he looked in retrospect on his sin, was its *reach*. In his dealings with Bathsheba and Uriah, David had overlooked the ultimate in the immediate. In the precipitancy of his yielding to temptation, all sense of proportion and of the real value of things had been swept away. He knew he had sinned against a woman's honour, and wronged a brave husband and soldier. But in the distorted folly of passion he imagined that all was well ended with Uriah dead on the field of battle, and Bathsheba free within his palace walls. He was now to discover the fundamental falseness of this, and all the ultimate implications of his sin were brought home to him with awful distinctness, so that there was wrung from him the cry, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight."

This again is the ultimate truth with regard to sin. In its immediate tragedy it involves our brother man in its ruinous consequences, but in its ultimate reach, it is a blow struck at God. For all sin, whether it be the violation of a law of brotherhood whereby society suffers, or whether it be a crime against one's own person or mind, must be judged in relation to him who framed the moral law, and who breathed into man the breath of life. Goodness, with all its canons and implications, has its source in God, and I cannot wound my brother man without striking a blow past him at the great Principal of all purity and good—the very Being of God. It was this vision of the ulti-

The Retrospect of Sin

mate reach of his sin that brought healing penitence to the wounded soul of David. The God who had delivered him, exalted him, loved him, protected him ; the God with Whom he had held communion in the silence of a thousand starry nights ; the Lord Whose praises had turned his harp and set a nation singing—*this* God he had wounded, spurned, and cast aside.

Ere we fall into hasty sin, let us remember the ultimate reach of the act of evil. Past self and society it wings its dart to wound the heart that died, and the Father Who loves.

Still another discovery did David make. Sin had *cost him his joy*. This must have been a painful and surprising fact for him. The false impulses of sinful desire had held our happiness as a sure result of achieving the object of desire. He imagined his happiness to be bound up with Bathsheba, and when all was accomplished, the dreadful truth came home to him, that not only in the fruit of his sin was there no real satisfaction, but that former "joy in the Lord," which had been his strength, seemed now lost for ever, and his soul cried aloud for its restoration. For a year of songlessness, with the dust thick upon his harp, and a sinful silence in his soul, must have been a dreadful thing for the erstwhile joyous Psalmist. God, nature, the divine providence—all these for the last fifty years had awakened in the heart of David a gladness that nothing could restrain. But now there was no desire to sing. His heart was joyless because his conscience was seared.

When shall we learn this ? Joy is not to be

The Conquest of the Gloom

found in the achievement of desire, but in the priceless possession of a good conscience "void of offence." Joy is the gift of God bestowed upon those who have enshrined His will within their hearts, and who make the doing of it their delight.

David found that there was a strange *paralysis about sin*. Surely this is involved in the thirteenth verse. The emphasis is upon the first word, "*then* will I teach transgressors they ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." When? After restoration and forgiveness. The evil could never be undone, and would never be forgotten. But the mercy of the Lord could heal his hurt, and give a new song. It may have been that in the year following his lapse, David had tried to win his way back to the old habits of service for God. He may have tried to "teach transgressors," or to give some witness to the God of Israel. But alas! he found his old power gone, and his lips sealed with an awful silence. It was the silence of a great and inward shame. What could he say to transgressors, who was himself the chief? What witness could he give, when a nation knew his folly?

To enter into the knowledge of sin is not to gain valuable experience whereby one may later serve God and man. No more pernicious doctrine was ever preached. The "pure in heart" see God. The branches that "abide" bring forth much fruit. Lives "full of the Holy Ghost and of joy" give witness "with great power."



The Value of Going Back

ADVANCE is not always the law of progress. It would not be difficult to make out a case from history that in politics and religion, as well as in the economic realm, what has been hailed as a new era of progress has been but the prelude to a period of depression and defeat. Napoleon's apparently overwhelming advance upon Moscow was but the beginning of a series of disasters which ended in St. Helena. The era of luxury, advanced thought, and apparent progress in Rome in reality opened the northern gateways to the Goths.

For progress must be an affair of the spirit as well as of circumstance. Those great moral and spiritual values, which lie at the heart of all true personal and national greatness, must keep step with material advance. Peril and disaster will ultimately follow where those two are divorced. The stakes must be strengthened if the ropes are to be safely lengthened. There is a real value in going back to those old and fundamental experiences which lie back of all abiding progress. The human spirit must have its anchorage, its place of rest and renewal, where, untouched by the false values of the atmosphere of fevered strife, it may be once more reminded of the things that really matter, of the ideals that are eternal, and of the resources that never fail.

This was true in the experience of Abram, when he found himself drawn back from Egypt "even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, unto the place of the altar which he had made at the first" (Gen. 13 : 3-4). How pitifully had the man of faith been overtaken by cowardice and deceit, until brought to his senses by the rebuke of a heathen monarch. The whole episode indicates a serious moral and spiritual lapse. The advance from Haran to Canaan had been undertaken in response to the divine guidance, and had been signally marked by the divine care and provision. Famine there might be, but Abram's God was the same. There was therefore no need to go to Egypt with its perils and its plenty. The promises of God are as dependable in the night of adversity, as in the day of prosperity. But Abram in his panic forgot this, and all the intimate experiences by the Plain of Moreh. He forgot his wife's honour in a cowardly fear for his own safety. He forgot his vows and the altar he had built at Bethel.

We do not know how long Abram stayed in Egypt, but it would appear to have been a considerable time. The record is passed over with commendable brevity. Yet there is one remarkable omission. Abram never built an altar in Egypt! How could he? He was living in deceit, and had no sense of the divine favour. It is impossible to "practise the presence of God" in such circumstances. There was no desire to build an altar, in the searching symbolism of which the hypocrisies and unfaithfulness of life might be laid bare. So the

The Value of Going Back

altars, which dotted the land of Canaan and had marked the march of faith, were neglected in Egypt, and Abram appears as a rather grasping Hebrew willing to purchase the royal goodwill at the price of his wife's honour.

Then came the awakening. As from the lips of a heathen sailor of a later day, there came the call to Jonah to rise and pray, so here God uses the rebuke of a heathen king to bring Abram to his senses. What was to be done? How could he get back the old certainty concerning the divine will and purpose? How hear again with assurance those amazing promises he had once so simply accepted? There was only one way and one place. Back to Bethel! From the altar there and its simple faith he had strayed, and surely there would he find again the lost assurance. And so Abram had to advance by going back, back to the beginning, back to the "place of the altar."

And there is no other way for the soul conscious that, amid the complexities and allurements of life, the high purpose has somehow been lost, and that enriching sense of the presence of God has gone. We shall have to return to the place we went astray, and it will usually be for you and me just what it was for Abram—a Bethel, with a broken altar and a forgotten vow.

It may be said of Isaiah also that he found out the value of going back. Scholars are agreed that the record we have in the sixth chapter of the call and spiritual experience of the prophet, was not written until a date considerably later than the happenings which it relates. Isaiah, in that remarkable sixth

The Conquest of the Gloom

chapter, is reminding himself of what happened years before when he saw the Lord exalted, heard the adorations of the seraphim, and felt the holy healing of the altar coal. In other words, Isaiah found it necessary and helpful to go back to that initial and crucial experience which set his feet on the rough and stony path of a prophet's career.

For success had not come as readily as he had expected. Surely with such a vivid experience, with such a call and holy enduement, his ministry would be attended by some signal national movement towards righteousness and faith. Surely there would be a generous response to the divine call to a higher life. It was a reasonable call, and it was proclaimed with earnestness and power. Thus reasoning, and with high hope, Isaiah commenced his ministry. But there was little response, and nothing remarkable happened. The nation went on to a very large extent heedless of the reasonable and burning words of the man of God. There was no great revival of religious life, no turning in penitence to Jehovah. Gradually Isaiah realized that the prophetic ministry was to be for him a long and arduous career, a life-work and service in which all the human and divine resources at his command would need to be expended. And here, perhaps, was where the prophet, like all the rest of us, found the severest test of his faith. He was tempted to doubt his call, to doubt his task and his fitness for it. It was a perilous moment for this man of God. How was he to face it?

Just by going back! As Abram went back to Bethel, so Isaiah had to go back to the beginnings,

The Value of Going Back

remind himself of his initial call, and encourage his faith as he went over step by step in brooding detail the dealing of God with his soul. This is the place and significance of the sixth chapter of Isaiah.

And to us the call came years ago, a call to God and service and sacrifice. It was all so real and vivid that from that vision of the Lord exalted we went forth expecting immediate and certain achievement. But the years have slipped past in fulfilling the colourless and rather dreary duties of the home, and nothing wonderful seems to have happened. Perhaps that vision splendid led us to seek service for the Kingdom of God upon a foreign shore, where we hoped that many in their need would respond to our flaming message. But it has not been so, and the years are passing. Or perhaps the call came to the ministry of the Word in our home land, and we expected many, in answer to our appeal, would turn penitently to God. But ours has been an undistinguished and very ordinary ministry. And others, by that early vision, set out with high ideals for the business world that were to glorify God and to exalt the brotherhood of man. Thus to all did the call come to find its response in varying forms of life and service. Yet, somehow, the fleeting years have not seen the splendid victory we hoped for, and sometimes, were we honest with ourselves, that vision of long ago grows dim, and doubt and uncertainty are not far away. Then back to the place of Vision let us go! Be your own remembrancer. Take time to go over those blessed memories one by one. Go over again and again what God said to you, and what you promised

The Conquest of the Gloom

God, till the calm and peace of a restored assurance flood your troubled spirit.

Even our Lord found a value in going back. This seems to be the significance of what we are told in John 10 : 40-42. "Jesus went across the Jordan, back to the spot where John had baptised him at the first. There he stayed." It was here at Bethabara that Christ stepped out into His public ministry. It was here that He felt the urge to identify Himself with sinful humanity in the waters of baptism. It was here the Spirit descended, and the Father acclaimed the beloved Son. And now, from the hatred and the flattery, and all the fret of opposition and misunderstanding, Jesus fled to the holy memories of Bethabara.

"He stayed there." It was no hurried visit, but a purposeful one. He sat by the quiet, tree-girt waters and saw the place where the rugged John had thundered forth his call to repentance. He recalled the wonder and amaze on that earnest face when the Son of God came forth to be baptised. He perhaps entered again those still waters, and felt their gentle chill as He did before on that great day. He heard anew in the silence the still, small voice of God, and His soul became strong again to take the way of the Cross.

With Abram and Isaiah and Jesus let us take time to go back, and it may be we shall find that for us retrogression is the way to the most abiding progress.

